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POEMS

OF

MEMORY AND HOPE.

BY

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY HENNESSY AND THWAITES.



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P O E M S

OF

MEMORY AND HOPE.

MEMORY AND HOPE.

BACK-LOOKING Memory

And prophet Hope both sprang from out the ground,
One, where the flashing of Cherubie sword
 Fell sad, in Eden's ward;
And one, from Eden earth, within the sound
Of the four rivers lapsing pleasantly,
What time the promise after curse was said—
 “Thy seed shall bruise his head.”

Poor Memory's brain is wild,
As moonstruck by that flaming atmosphere
When she was born. Her deep eyes shine and shone
 With light that conquereth sun
And stars to wanner paleness year by year;
With odorous gums, she mixeth things defiled;
She trampleth down earth's grasses green and sweet,
 With her far-wandering feet.

She plucketh many flowers,
Their beauty on her bosom's coldness killing ;
She teacheth every melancholy sound
 To winds and waters round ;
She droppeth tears with seed, where man is tilling
The rugged soil in his exhausted hours ;
She smileth—ah me ! in her smile doth go
 A mood of deeper woe !

Hope tripped on out of sight
Crowned with Eden wreath she saw not wither,
And went a-nodding through the wilderness,
 With brow that shone no less
Than a sea-gull's wing, brought nearer by rough weather ;
Searching the treeless rock for fruits of light ;
Her fair quick feet being armed from stones and cold,
 By slippers of pure gold.

Memory did Hope much wrong,
And, while she dreamed, her slippers stole away ;
But still she wended on with mirth unheeding,
 Although her feet were bleeding ;
Till Memory tracked her on a certain day,
And with most evil eyes did search her long
And cruelly, wherat she sank to ground
 In a stark deadly swoon.

And so my hope were slain,
Had it not been that THOU wert standing near,
Oh Thou, who saidest "live" to creatures lying
In their own blood and dying!
For Thou her forehead to thine heart didst rear
And make its silent pulses sing again,—
Pouring a new light o'er her darkened eyne,
With tender tears from Thine!

Therefore my hope arose
From out her swound and gazed upon Thy face,
And meeting there that soft subduing look
Which Peter's spirit shook,
Sank downward in a rapture to embrace
Thy pierced hands and feet with kisses close,
And prayed Thee to assist her evermore
To "reach the things before."

Then gavest Thou the smile
Whence angel-wings thrill quick like summer lightning,
Vouchsafing rest beside Thee, where she never
From Love and Faith may sever;
Whereat the Eden crown she saw not whitening
A time ago, though whitening all the while,
Reddened with life, to hear the Voice which talked
To Adam as he walked.



CHANGE UPON CHANGE.

FIVE months ago, the stream did flow,

The lilies bloomed within the sedge;

And we were lingering to and fro,—

Where none will track thee in this snow,

Along the stream, beside the hedge

Ah, sweet, be free to love and go!

For it I do not hear thy foot,

The frozen river is as mute,

The flowers have dried down to the root;

And why, since these be changed since May,

Shouldst *thou* change less than *they*?

And slow, slow, as the winter snow,

The tears have dritted to mine eyes;

And my poor cheeks, five months ago,

Set blushing at thy praises so,

Put paleness on for a disguise,

Ah, sweet, be free to praise and go!

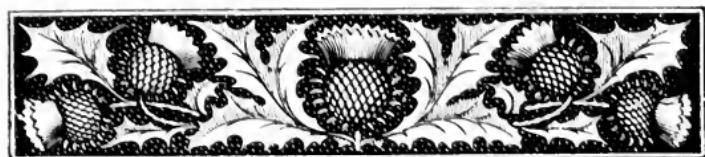
For if my face is turned to pale,

It was thine oath that first did fail,—

It was thy love proved false and frail!

And why, since these be changed enow,

Should *I* change less than *thou*?



A CHILD'S THOUGHT OF GOD.

THEY say that God lives very high,

But if you look above the pines
You cannot see our God ; and why ?

And if you dig down in the mines

You never see Him in the gold ;
Though, from Him, all that's glory shines.

God is so good, He wears a fold

Of heaven and earth across his face --
Like secrets kept, for love, untold.

But still I feel that His embrace

Slides down by thrills, through all things made,
Through sight and sound of every place.

As if my tender mother laid

On my shut lids, her kisses' pressure,
Half-waking me at night, and said
"Who kissed you through the dark, dear guesser?"



LITTLE MATTIE.

DEAD ! Thirteen a month ago !
 Short and narrow her life's walk,
 Lover's love she could not know
 Even by a dream or talk :
 Too young to be glad of youth ;
 Missing honour, labour, rest,
 And the warmth of a babe's mouth
 At the blossom of her breast.
 Must you pity her for this,
 And for all the loss it is—
 You, her mother with wet face,
 Having had all in your case ?

Just so young but yesternight,
 Now she is as old as death.
 Meek, obedient in your sight,
 Gentle to a beek or breath
 Only on last Monday ! yours,
 Answering you like silver bells

Lightly touched ! an hour matures :

You can teach her nothing else.

She has seen the mystery hid

Under Egypt's pyramid,

By those eyelids pale and close

Now she knows what Rhamses knows.

Cross her quiet hands, and smooth

Down her patient locks of silk,

Cold and passive as in truth

You your fingers in spilt milk

Drew along a marble floor ;

But her lips you cannot wring

Into saying a word more,

"Yes" or "no," or such a thing.

Though you call and beg and wreak

Half your soul out in a shriek,

She will lie there in default

And most innocent revolt.

Ay, and if she spoke, may be

She would answer like the Sox,

"What is now 'twixt thee and me?"

Dreadful answer ! better none,

Yours on Monday, God's to-day !

Yours, your child, your blood, your heart.

Called . . . you called her, did you say,
"Little Mattie" for your part?
Now already it sounds strange,
And you wonder, in this change,
What He calls His angel-creature,
Higher up than you can reach her.

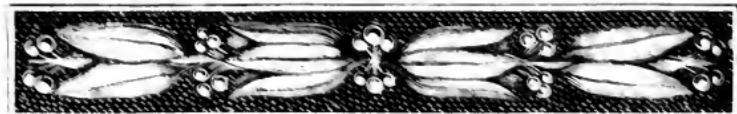
"Twas a green and easy world
As she took it ! room to play,
(Though one's hair might get uncurled
At the far end of the day.)
What she suffered she shook off
In the sunshine ; what she sinned
She could pray on high enough
To keep safe above the wind.
If reproved by God or you,
"Twas to better her she knew ;
And, if crossed, she gathered still
"Twas to cross out something ill.

You, you had the right, you thought,
To survey her with sweet scorn,
Poor gay child, who had not caught
Yet the octave-stretch forlorn
Of your larger wisdom ! Nay,
Now your places are changed so,

In that same superior way
She regards you dull and low
As you did herself exempt
From life's sorrows. Grand contempt
Of the spirits risen awhile,
Who look back with such a smile!

There's the sting o' t'. That, I think,
Hurts the most, a thousandfold!
To feel sudden, at a wink,
Some dear child we used to scold,
Praise, love both ways, kiss and tease,
Teach and tumble as our own
All its curls about our knees,
Rise up suddenly full-grown.
Who could wonder such a sight
Made a woman mad outright?
— Show me Michael with the sword
Rather than such angels, Lord!





ISOBEL'S CHILD.

— so find we profit,
By losing of our prayers.

SHAKESPEARE.

To rest the weary nurse has gone,
An eight-day watch had watchèd she,
Still rocking beneath sun and moon
The baby on her knee,
Till Isobel its mother said
“The fever waneth—wend to bed,
For now the watch comes round to me.”

Then wearily the nurse did throw
Her pallet in the darkest place
Of that sick room, and slept and dreamed.
For as the gusty wind did blow
The night-lamp's glare across her face,
She saw, or seemed to see, but dreamed,
That the poplars tall on the opposite hill,
The seven tall poplars on the hill,
Did clasp the setting sun until

His rays dropped from him, pined and still
As blossoms in frost !



Till he waned and paled, so weirdly crossed,
To the colour of moonlight which doth pass

Over the dank ridged churchyard grass,

The poplars held the sun, and he
The eyes of the nurse that they should not see,
Not for a moment, the babe on her knee,
Though she shuddered to feel that it grew to be
Too chill, and lay too heavily,

She only dreamed; for all the while
'Twas Lady Isobel that kept
The little baby,—and it slept
Fast, warm, as if its mother's smile,
Laden with love's dewy weight,
And red as rose of Harpoerate
Dropt upon its eyelids, pressed
Lashes to cheek in a sealed rest.

And more and more smiled Isobel
To see the baby sleep so well—

She knew not that she smiled,
Against the lattice dull and wild
Drive the heavy droning drops,
Drop by drop, the sound being one—
As momently time's segments fall
On the ear of God, who hears through all
Eternity's unbroken monotone.
And more and more smiled Isobel
To see the baby sleep so well—

She knew not that she smiled,
The wind in intermission stops
Down in the beechen forest,
Then cries aloud
As one at the sorest,
Self-stung, self-driven,
And rises up to its very tops,
Stiffening erect the branches bowed,
Dilating with a tempest-soul
The trees that with their dark hands break
Through their own outline and heavily roll
Shadows as massive as clouds in heaven,
Across the castle lake.
And more and more smiled Isobel
To see the baby sleep so well :
She knew not that she smiled ;
She knew not that the storm was wild.
Through the uproar drear she could not hear
The castle clock which strnek anear—
She heard the low, light breathing of her child.

O sight for wondering look !
While the external nature broke
Into such abandonment,
While the very mist heart-rent
By the lightning, seemed to eddy
Against nature, with a din,

A sense of silence and of steady
Natural calm appeared to come
From things without, and enter in
The human creature's room.

So motionless she sate,
The babe asleep upon her knees,
You might have dreamed their souls had gone
Away to things inanimate,
In such to live, in such to moan ;
And that their bodies had ta'en back,
In mystic change, all silences
That cross the sky in cloudy rack,
Or dwell beneath the reedy ground
In waters safe from their own sound.

Only she wore
The deepening smile I named before,
And *that* a deepening love expressed ;
And who at once can love and rest ?

In sooth the smile that then was keeping
Watch upon the baby sleeping,
Floated with its tender light
Downward, from the drooping eyes,
Upward, from the lips apart,
Over cheeks which had grown white
With an eight-day weeping.

All smiles come in such a wise,
Where tears shall fall or have of old—
Like northern lights that fill the heart
Of heaven in sign of cold.

Motionless she sate,
Her hair had fallen by its weight
On each side of her smile, and lay
Very blackly on the arm
Where the baby nestled warm,
Pale as baby carved in stone
Seen by glimpses of the moon
Up a dark cathedral aisle.
But, through the storm, no moonbeam fell
Upon the child of Isobel
Perhaps you saw it by the ray
Alone of her still smile.

A solemn thing it is to me
To look upon a babe that sleeps ;
Wearing in its spirit-deeps
The undeveloped mystery
Of our Adam's taint and woe,
Which, when they developed be,
Will not let it slumber so !
Lying new in life beneath

The shadow of the coming death,
With that soft, low, quiet breath,
As if it felt the sun !

Knowing all things by their blooms,
Not their roots, yea, sun and sky,
Only by their warmth that comes
Out of each,—earth, only by
The pleasant hues that o'er it run,—
And human love, by drops of sweet
White nourishment still hanging round
The little mouth so slumber-bound.
All which broken sentiency
And conclusion incomplete,
Will gather and unite and climb
To an immortality
Good or evil, each sublime,
Through life and death to life again.

O little lids now folded fast,
Must ye learn to drop at last
Our large and burning tears?
O warm quick body, must thou lie,
When the time comes round to die,
Still, from all the whirl of years,
Bare of all the joy and pain?—
O small frail being, wilt thou stand
At God's right hand,
Lifting up those sleeping eyes
Dilated by great destinies,

To an endless waking? thrones and seraphim,
Through the long ranks of their solemnities,
Sunning thee with calm looks of Heaven's surprise,

But thine alone on Him?—

Or else, self-willed, to tread the Godless place,
(God keep thy will!) feel thine own energies
Cold, strong, objectless, like a dead man's clasp,
The sleepless deathless life within thee, grasp,—
While myriad faces, like one changeless face,
With woe *not love's*, shall glass thee everywhere,
And overcome thee with thine own despair?

More soft, less solemn images
Drifted o'er the lady's heart,

Silently as snow.

She had seen eight days depart
Hour by hour, on bended knees,
With pale-wrung hands and prayings low
And broken, through which came the sound
Of tears that fell against the ground,
Making sad stops:—"Dear Lord, dear Lord!"
She still had prayed, (the heavenly word,
Broken by an earthly sigh)
—"Thou, who didst not erst deny
The mother-joy to Mary mild,
Blessèd in the blessèd child,
Which harkened in meek babyhood

Her cradle-hymn, albeit used
To all that music interfused
In breasts of angels high and good !
Oh, take not, Lord, my babe away—
Oh, take not to thy songful heaven
The pretty baby thou hast given,
Or ere that I have seen him play
Around his father's knees and known
That *he* knew how my love has gone
From all the world to him.
Think, God among the cherubim,
How I shall shiver every day
In thy June sunshine, knowing where
The grave-grass keeps it from his fair
Still cheeks ! and feel at every tread
His little body which is dead
And hidden in the turf-y fold,
Doth make thy whole warm earth a-cold !
O God, I am so young, so young—
I am not used to tears at nights
Instead of slumber—nor to prayer
With sobbing lips and hands out-wrung !
Thou knowest all my prayings were
‘I bless thee, God, for past delights—
Thank God !’ I am not used to bear
Hard thoughts of death ; the earth doth cover
No face from me of friend or lover.
And must the first who teaches me

The form of shrouds and funerals, be
Mine own first-born beloved ? he
Who taught me first this mother-love !
Dear Lord, who spreadest out above
Thy loving, transpierced hands to meet
All lifted hearts with blessings sweet,—
Pierce not my heart, my tender heart,
Thou madest tender ! Thou who art
So happy in thy heaven alway !
Take not mine only bliss away !”

She so had prayed : and God, who hears
Through seraph-songs the sound of tears,
From that belovèd babe had ta'en
The fever and the beating pain.
And more and more smiled Isobel
To see the baby sleep so well,
(She knew not that she smiled I wis)
Until the pleasant gradual thought
Which near her heart the smile enwrought,
Now soft and slow, itself, did seem
To float along a happy dream,
Beyond it into speech like this.

“I prayed for thee, my little child,
And God has heard my prayer !

And when thy babyhood is gone,
We two together undefiled
By men's repinings, will kneel down
Upon His earth which will be fair
(Not covering thee, sweet !) to us twain,
And give him thankful praise."

Dully and wildly drives the rain.
Against the lattices drives the rain.

"I thank Him now, that I can think
 Of those same future days,
Nor from the harmless image shrink
 Of what I there might see—
Strange babies on their mothers' knee,
Whose innocent soft faces might
From off mine eyelids strike the light,
 With looks not meant for me !"

Gustily blows the wind through the rain,
As against the lattices drives the rain.

"But now, O baby mine, together,
We turn this hope of ours again
To many an hour of summer weather,
When we shall sit and intertwine
Our spirits, and instruct each other

In the pure loves of child and mother !
Two human loves make one divine."

The thunder tears through the wind and the rain,
As full on the lattices drives the rain.

"My little child, what wilt thou choose ?
Now let me look at thee and ponder.
What gladness, from the gladnesses
Futurity is spreading under
Thy gladsome sight ? Beneath the trees
Wilt thou lean all day, and lose
Thy spirit with the river seen
Intermittently between
The winding beechen alleys,—
Half in labour, half repose,
Like a shepherd keeping sheep,
Thou, with only thoughts to keep
Which never a bound will overpass,
And which are innocent as those
That feed among Arcadian valleys
Upon the dewy grass ?"

The large white owl that with age is blind,
That hath sate for years in the old tree hollow,
Is carried away in a gust of wind !
His wings could bear him not as fast

As he goeth now the lattice past—
He is borne by the winds ; the rains do follow :
His white wings to the blast out-flowing,
 He hooteth in going,
And still, in the lightnings, coldly glitter
 His round unblinking eyes.

"Or, baby, wilt thou think it fitter
To be eloquent and wise,—
One upon whose lips the air
Turns to solemn verities,
For men to breathe anew and win
A deeper-seated life within ?
Wilt be a philosopher,
By whose voice the earth and skies
Shall speak to the unborn ?
Or a poet, broadly spreading
The golden immortalities
Of thy soul on natures lorn
And poor of such, them all to guard
From their decay,—beneath thy treading,
Earth's flowers recovering hues of Eden,—
And stars drawn downward by thy looks,
To shine ascendant in thy books ?"

The tame hawk in the castle-yard,
How it screams to the lightning, with its wet

Jagged plumes overhanging the parapet !
And at the lady's door the hound
Scratches with a crying sound.

"But, O my babe, thy lids are laid
Close, fast upon thy cheek, —
And not a dream of power and sheen
Can make a passage up between ;
Thy heart is of thy mother's made,
Thy looks are very meek ;
And it will be their chosen place
To rest on some beloved face,
As these on thine—and let the noise
Of the whole world go on, nor drown
The tender silence of thy joys !
Or when that silence shall have grown
Too tender for itself, the same
Yearning for sound,—to look above
And utter its one meaning, LOVE,
That *He* may hear His name !"

No wind, no rain, no thunder !
The waters had trickled not slowly,
The thunder was not spent,
Nor the wind near finishing,
Who would have said that the storm was
diminishing ?

No wind, no rain, no thunder !
Their noises dropped asunder
From the earth and the firmament,
From the towers and the lattices,
Abrupt and echoless
As ripe fruits on the ground unshaken wholly—
As life in death !
And sudden and solemn the silence fell,
Startling the heart of Isobel
As the tempest could not.
Against the door went panting the breath
Of the lady's hound whose cry was still,
And she, constrained howe'er she would not,
Lifted her eyes, and saw the moon
Looking out of heaven alone
Upon the poplared hill.—
A calm of God, made visible
That men might bless it at their will.

The moonshine on the baby's face
Falleth clear and cold.
The mother's looks have fallen back
To the same place :
Because no moon with silver rack,
Nor broad sunrise in jasper skies
Has power to hold
Our loving eyes,

Which still revert as ever must
Wonder and Hope, to gaze on the dust.

The moonshine on the baby's face
Cold and clear remaineth.
The mother's looks do shrink away,—
The mother's looks return to stay,
As charmèd by what paineth.
Is any glamour in the case ?
Is it dream or is it sight ?
Hath the change upon the wild
Elements, that signs the night,
Passed upon the child ?
It is not dream, but sight !—

The babe has awakened from sleep,
And unto the gaze of its mother
Bent over it, lifted another !
Not the baby looks that go
Unaimingly to and fro,
But an earnest gazing deep,
Such as soul gives soul at length,
When, by work and wail of years,
It winneth a solemn strength,
And mourneth as it wears.
A strong man could not brook
With pulse unhurried by fears,

To meet that baby's look
O'er glazed by manhood's tears—
The tears of a man full grown,
With a power to wring our own,
In the eyes all undefiled
Of a little three-months' child !
To see that babe-brow wrought
By the witnessing of thought,
To judgment's prodigy !
And the small soft mouth unweaned,
By mother's kiss o'erleaned,
(Putting the sound of loving
Where no sound else was moving,
Except the speechless cry)
Quickened to mind's expression,
Shaped to articulation,
Yea, uttering words—yea, naming woe,
In tones that with it strangely went,
Because so baby-innocent.
As the child spake out the mother so.—

“O mother, mother, loose thy prayer !
Christ's name hath made it strong.
It bindeth me, it holdeth me
With its most loving cruelty,
From floating my new soul along
The happy heavenly air.

It bindeth me, it holdeth me
In all this dark, upon this dull
Low earth, by only weepers trod !—
It bindeth me, it holdeth me !—
Mine angel looketh sorrowful
Upon the face of God.*

“Mother, mother, can I dream
Beneath your earthly trees ?
I had a vision and a gleam—
I heard a sound more sweet than these
When rippled by the wind.

Did you see the Dove with wings
Bathed in golden glisterings
From a sunless light behind,
Dropping on me from the sky
Soft as a mother's kiss until
I seemed to leap, and yet was still ?
Saw you how His love-large eye
Looked upon me mystic calms,
Till the power of his divine
Vision was indrawn to mine ?

“Oh, the dream within the dream !
I saw celestial places even.

* For I say unto you, that in Heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in Heaven.—Matt. ch. xviii., ver. 10.

Oh, the vistas of high palms,
Making finites of delight
Through the heavenly infinite—
Lifting up their green still tops
To the heaven of Heaven !

Oh, the sweet life-tree that drops
Shade like light across the river
Glorified in its for ever
Flowing from the Throne !

Oh, the shining holinesses
Of the thousand, thousand faces
God-sunned by the thronèd ONE !
And made intense with such a love,
That though I saw them turned above,
Each loving seemed for also me !

And, oh, the Unspeakable, the HE.
The manifest in secracies,
Yet of mine own heart partaker,—
With the overcoming look
Of One who hath been once forsook,
And blessedèd the forsaker.

Mother, mother, let me go
Toward the Face that looketh so.
Through the mystic, wingèd Four
Whose are inward, outward eyes
Dark with light of mysteries,
And the restless evermore
'Holy, holy, holy.'—through

The sevenfold Lamps that burn in view
Of cherubim and seraphim,—
Through the four-and-twenty crowned
Stately elders, white around,
Suffer me to go to Him !

“ Is your wisdom very wise,
Mother, on the narrow earth,
Very happy, very worth
That I should stay to learn ?
Are these air-corrupting sighs
Fashioned by unlearnèd breath ?
Do the students’ lamps that burn
All night, illumine death ?
Mother, albeit this be so,
Loose thy prayer, and let me go
Where that bright chief angel stands
Apart from all his brother bands,
Too glad for smiling, having bent
In angelic wilderment
O'er the depths of God, and brought
Reeling thence, one only thought
To fill his whole eternity.
He the teacher is for me !—
He can teach what I would know—
Mother, mother, let me go !

"Can your poet make an Eden
No winter will undo,
And light a starry fire while heeding
His hearth's is burning too?
Drown in music the earth's din,
And keep his own wild soul within
The law of his own harmony?—
Mother, albeit this be so,
Let me to my Heavèn go!
A little harp me waits thereby—
A harp whose strings are golden all,
And tuned to music spherical,
Hanging on the green life-tree
Where no willows ever be.
Shall I miss that harp of mine?
Mother, no!—the Eye divine
Turned upon it, makes it shine;
And when I touch it, poems sweet
Like separate souls shall fly from it,
Each to an immortal fytte.
We shall all be poets there,
Gazing on the chiefest Fair.

"Love! earth's love! and can we love
Fixedly where all things move?
Can the sinning love each other?

Mother, mother,
I tremble in thy close embrace,
I feel thy tears adown my face,
Thy prayers do keep me out of bliss—
O dreary earthly love !
Loose thy prayer and let me go
To the place which loving is,
Yet not sad ; and when is given
Escape to *thee* from this below,
Thou shalt behold me that I wait
For thee beside the happy Gate,
And silence shall be up in heaven
To hear our greeting kiss."

The nurse awakes in the morning sun,
And starts to see beside her bed
The lady with a grandeur spread
Like pathos o'er her face,—as one
God-satisfied and earth-undone.

The babe upon her arm was dead !
And the nurse could utter forth no cry,—
She was awed by the calm in the mother's eye.

"Wake, nurse !" the lady said ;
"We are waking—he and I—
I, on earth, and he, in sky !

And thou must help me to o'erlay
With garment white, this little clay
Which needs no more our lullaby.

"I changed the cruel prayer I made,
And bowed my meekened face, and prayed
That God would do His will ! and thus
He did it, nurse ! He parted *us*,
And His sun shows victorious
The dead calm face,—and *I* am calm.
And Heaven is harkening a new psalm.

"This earthly noise is too anear,
Too loud, and will not let me hear
The little harp. My death will soon
Make silence."

And a sense of tune,
A satisfied love meanwhile
Which nothing earthly could despoil,
Sang on within her soul.

Oh you,
Earth's tender and impassioned few,
Take courage to intrust your love

To Him so Named, who guards above
Its ends, and shall fulfil !
Breaking the narrow prayers that may
Befit your narrow hearts, away
In His broad, loving will.

* THE PET-NAME.

————— the name
Which from THEIR lips seemed a caress.
MISS MITFORD's *Dramatic Scenes*.

I HAVE a name, a little name,
Uncadenced for the ear,
Unhonoured by ancestral claim,
Unsanctified by prayer and psalm
The solemn font anear.

It never did, to pages wove
For gay romance, belong.
It never dedicate did move
As "Sacharissa," unto love—
"Orinda," unto song.

Though I write books it will be read
Upon the leaves of none,

And afterward, when I am dead,
Will ne'er be graved for sight or tread,
 Across my funeral-stone.

This name, whoever chane to call,
 Perhaps your smile may win.
Nay, do not smile ! mine eyelids fall
Over mine eyes, and feel withal
 The sudden tears within.

Is there a leaf that greenly grows
 Where summer meadows bloom,
But gathereth the winter snows,
And changeth to the hue of those,
 If lasting till they come ?

Is there a word, or jest, or game,
 But time incrusteth round
With sad associate thoughts the same ?
And so to me my very name
 Assumes a mournful sound.

My brother gave that name to me
 When we were children twain,—
When names acquired baptismally
Were hard to utter, as to see
 That life had any pain.

No shade was on us then, save one
Of chestnuts from the hill—
And through the wood our laugh did run
As part thereof. The mirth being done,
He calls me by it still.

Nay, do not smile ! I hear in it
What none of you can hear,—
The talk upon the willow seat,
The bird and wind that did repeat
Around, our human cheer.

I hear the birthday's noisy bliss,
My sister's woodland glee,—
My father's praise, I did not miss,
When stooping down he cared to kiss
The poet at his knee,—

And voices, which, to name me, aye
Their tenderest tones were keeping—
To some I never more can say
An answer, till God wipes away
In heaven these drops of weeping.

My name to me a sadness wears,
No murmurs cross my mind.

Now God be thanked for these thick tears,
Which show, of those departed years,
Sweet memories left behind.

Now God be thanked for years inwrought
With love which softens yet.
Now God be thanked for every thought
Which is so tender it has caught
Earth's guerdon of regret.

Earth saddens, never shall remove
Affections purely given ;
And e'en that mortal grief shall prove
The immortality of love,
And heighten it with Heaven.





THE MOURNING MOTHER

(OF THE DEAD BLIND).

Dost thou weep, mourning mother,
For thy blind boy in the grave ?
That no more with each other,
Sweet counsel ye can have ?—
That he, left dark by nature,
Can never more be led
By thee, maternal creature,
Along smooth paths instead ?
That thou canst no more show him
The sunshine, by the heat ;
The river's silver flowing,
By murmurs at his feet ?
The foliage, by its coolness ;
The roses, by their smell ;
And all creation's fulness,
By Love's invisible ?
Weepest thou to behold not
His meek blind eyes again,—

Closed doorways which were folded,
And prayed against in vain—
And under which, sate smiling
The child-mouth evermore,
As one who watcheth, wiling
The time by, at a door?
And weepest thou to feel not
His clinging hand on thine—
Which now, at dream-time, will not
Its cold touch disentwine?
And weepest thou still after,
Oh, never more to mark
His low soft words, made softer
By speaking in the dark?
Weep on, thou mourning mother!

But since to him when living
Thou wast both sun and moon,
Look o'er his grave, surviving
From a high sphere alone.
Sustain that exaltation,
Expand that tender light,
And hold in mother-passion
Thy Blessèd in thy sight.
See how he went out straightway
From the dark world he knew,—
No twilight in the gateway

To mediate 'twixt the two,—
Into the sudden glory,
Out of the dark he trod,
Departing from before thee
At once to light and God !—
For the first face, beholding
The Christ's in its divine,
For the first place, the golden
And tideless hyaline ;
With trees, at lasting summer,
That rock to songful sound,
While angels, the new-comer,
Wrap a still smile around.
Oh, in the blessed psalm now,
His happy voice he tries,
Spreading a thicker palm-bough,
Than others, o'er his eyes !
Yet still, in all the singing,
Thinks haply of thy song
Which, in his life's first springing,
Sang to him all night long ;
And wishes it beside him,
With kissing lips that cool
And soft did overglide him,
To make the sweetness full.
Look up, O mourning mother,
Thy blind boy walks in light ;
Ye wait for one another,

Before God's infinite,
But thou art now the darkest,
Thou mother left below—
Thou, the sole blind,—thou markest,
Content that it be so,—
Until ye two have meeting
Where Heaven's pearl-gate is,
And *he* shall lead thy feet in,
As once thou leddest *his*.
Wait on, thou mourning mother.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY.

To the belfry, one by one, went the ringers from the sun,
Toll slowly.

And the oldest ringer said, "Ours is music for the Dead,
When the rebecks are all done."

Six abeles i' the churchyard grow on the northside in a row,
Toll slowly.

And the shadows of their tops rock across the little slopes
Of the grassy graves below.

On the south side and the west, a small river runs in haste,
Toll slowly.

And between the river flowing and the fair green trees
a-growing
Do the dead lie at their rest.

On the east I sate that day, up against a willow gray.

Toll slowly.

Through the rain of willow-branches, I could see the low
hill ranges,
And the river on its way.

There I sate beneath the tree, and the bell tolled solemnly,
Toll slowly.

While the trees' and river's voices flowed between the sol-
emn noises,—
Yet death seemed more loud to me.

There, I read this ancient rhyme, while the bell did all the
time

Toll slowly.

And the solemn knell fell in with the tale of life and sin,
Like a rhythmic fate sublime.

THE RHYME.

Broad the forests stood (I read) on the hills of Linteged—
Toll slowly.

And three hundred years had stood mute adown each hoary wood,

Like a full heart having prayed.

And the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west,
Toll slowly.

And but little thought was theirs of the silent antique years,
In the building of their nest.

Down the sun dropt large and red, on the towers of
Linteged,—

Toll slowly.

Lance and spear upon the height, bristling strange in fiery light,

While the castle stood in shade.

There, the castle stood up black, with the red sun at its back,—

Toll slowly.

Like a sullen smouldering pyre, with a top that flickers fire
When the wind is on its track.

And five hundred archers tall did besiege the castle wall,
Toll slowly.

And the castle, seethed in blood, fourteen days and nights
had stood,

And to-night was near its fall.

Yet thereunto, blind to doom, three months since, a bride did come,—

Toll slowly.

One who proudly trod the floors, and softly whispered in the doors,

“ May good angels bless our home.”

Oh, a bride of queenly eyes, with a front of constancies !

Toll slowly.

Oh, a bride of cordial mouth,—where the untired smile of youth

Did light outward its own sighs.

’Twas a Duke’s fair orphan-girl, and her uncle’s ward, the Earl ;

Toll slowly.

Who betrothed her twelve years old, for the sake of dowry gold,

To his son Lord Leigh, the churl.

But what time she had made good all her years of womanhood,

Toll slowly.

Unto both those lords of Leigh, spake she out right sovranly,

“ My will runneth as my blood.

"And while this same blood makes red the same right hand's veins," she said,—

Toll slowly.

"'Tis my will as lady free, not to wed a lord of Leigh,
But Sir Guy of Linteged."

The old Earl he smiled smooth, then he sighed for wilful youth,—

Toll slowly.

"Good my niecee, that hand withal looketh somewhat soft
and small
For so large a will, in sooth."

She too, smiled by that same sign,—but her smile was cold
and fine,—

Toll slowly.

"Little hand clasps muckle gold, or it were not worth the hold
Of thy son, good uncle mine!"

Then the young lord jerked his breath, and sware thickly in
his teeth,

Toll slowly.

"He would wed his own betrothed, an she loved him an she
loathed,
Let the life come or the death."

Up she rose with scornful eyes, as her father's child might
rise,—

Toll slowly.

"Thy hound's blood, my lord of Leigh, stains thy knightly
heel," quoth she,

"And he moans not where he lies.

"But a woman's will dies hard, in the hall or on the
sward!"—

Toll slowly.

"By that grave, my lords, which made me orphaned girl
and dowered lady,

I deny you wife and ward."

Unto each she bowed her head, and swept past with lofty
tread.

Toll slowly.

Ere the midnight bell had ceased, in the chapel had the
priest

Blessed her, bride of Linteged.

Fast and fain the bridal train along the night-storm rode
amain.

Toll slowly.

Hard the steeds of lord and serf struck their hoofs out on
the turf,

In the pauses of the rain.

Fast and fain the kinsmen's train along the storm pursued
amain—

Toll slowly.

Steed on steed-track, dashing off—thickening, doubling,
hoof on hoof,

In the pauses of the rain.

And the bridegroom led the flight on his red-roan steed of
might,

Toll slowly.

And the bride lay on his arm, still, as if she feared no harm,
Smiling out into the night.

“Dost thou fear?” he said at last—“Nay,” she answered
him in haste,—

Toll slowly.

“Not such death as we could find—only life with one
behind—

Ride on fast as fear—ride fast!”

Up the mountain wheeled the steed—girth to ground, and
fetlocks spread,—

Toll slowly.

Headlong bounds and rocking flanks,—down he staggered,
down the banks,

To the towers of Linteged.

High and low the serfs looked out, red the flambeaus tossed about,—

Toll slowly.



In the courtyard rose the cry—"Live the Duchess and Sir Guy!"

But she never heard them shout.

On the steed she dropt her cheek, kissed his mane and
kissed his neck,—

Toll slowly.

“I had happier died by thee, than lived on a Lady Leigh,”
Were the first words she did speak.

But a three months’ joyaunce lay ‘twixt that moment and
to-day,

Toll slowly.

When five hundred archers tall stand beside the castle
wall,

To recapture Duchess May.

And the castle standeth black, with the red sun at its
back —

Toll slowly.

And a fortnight’s siege is done—and, except the duchess,
none

Can misdoubt the coming wrack.

Then the captain, young Lord Leigh, with his eyes so gray
of blee,

Toll slowly.

And thin lips that scarcely sheathe the cold white gnashing
of his teeth,

Gnashed in smiling, absently,

Cried aloud, "So goes the day, bridegroom fair of Duchess May!"—

Toll slowly.

"Look thy last upon that sun! if thou seest to-morrow's
one,

"Twill be through a foot of clay.

"Ha, fair bride! dost hear no sound, save that moaning of
the hound!"

Toll slowly.

"Thou and I have parted troth,—yet I keep my vengeance-
oath,

And the other may come round.

"Ha! thy will is brave to dare, and thy new love past
compare,"—

Toll slowly.

"Yet thine old love's faulchion brave is as strong a thing
to have,

As the will of lady fair.

"Peck on blindly, netted dove!—If a wife's name thee
believe,"

Toll slowly.

"Thou shalt wear the same to-morrow, ere the grave has
hid the sorrow

Of thy last ill-mated love.

"O'er his fixed and silent mouth, thou and I will call back
troth."

Toll slowly.

"He shall altar be and priest,—and he will not cry at least
'I forbid you—I am loth!'

"I will wring thy fingers pale in the gauntlet of my mail."

Toll slowly.

"Little hand and muckle gold' close shall lie within my
hold,"

As the sword did, to prevail."

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west,

Toll slowly.

Oh, and laughed the Duchess May, and her soul did put
away

All his boasting for a jest.

In her chamber did she sit, laughing low to think of it,—

Toll slowly.

"Tower is strong and will is free—thou canst boast, my
lord of Leigh,

But thou boastest little wit."

In her tire-glass gazèd she, and she blushed right womanly.

Toll slowly.

She blushed half from her disdain—half, her beauty was so plain,

—“Oath for oath, my lord of Leigh !”

Straight she called her maidens in—“Since ye gave me blame herein,”

Toll slowly.

“That a bridal such as mine should lack gauds to make it fine,

Come and shrive me from that sin.

“It is three months gone to-day, since I gave mine hand away.”

Toll slowly.

“Bring the gold and bring the gem, we will keep bride-state in them,

While we keep the foe at bay.

“On your arms I loose mine hair!—comb it smooth and crown it fair.”

Toll slowly.

“I would look in purple pall from the lattice down the wall,
And throw scorn to one that’s there !”

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west.

Toll slowly.

On the tower the castle's lord leant in silence on his sword,
With an anguish in his breast,

With a spirit-laden weight, did he lean down passionate,
Toll slowly.

They have almost sapped the wall,—they will enter therewithal,
With no knocking at the gate,

Then the sword he leant upon, shivered, snapped upon the stone, —

Toll slowly.

“Sword,” he thought, with inward laugh, “ill thou servest
for a staff
When thy nobler use is done !

“Sword, thy nobler use is done!—tower is lost, and shame
begun!” —

Toll slowly.

“If we met them in the breach, hilt to hilt or speech to
speech,
We should die there, each for one,

“If we met them at the wall, we should singly, vainly
fall.”

Toll slowly.

"But if I die here alone,—then I die, who am but one,
And die nobly for them all,

"Five true friends lie for my sake, in the moat and in the
brake,"

Toll slowly.

"Thirteen warriors lie at rest, with a black wound in the
breast,

And not one of these will wake,

"So no more of this shall be!—heart-blood weighs too
heavily,"

Toll slowly.

"And I could not sleep in grave, with the faithful and the
brave

Heaped around and over me,

"Since young Clare a mother hath, and young Ralph a
plighted faith,"

Toll slowly.

"Since my pale young sister's checks blush like rose when
Ronald speaks,

Albeit never a word she saith—

"These shall never die for me—life-blood falls too heavily!"

Toll slowly.

“ And if *I* die here apart,—o'er my dead and silent heart
They shall pass out safe and free.

“ When the foe hath heard it said—‘ Death holds Guy of
Linteged,’ ”

Toll slowly.

“ That new corse new peace shall bring, and a blessedèd
blessèd thing

Shall the stone be at its head.

“ Then my friends shall pass out free, and shall bear my
memory”—

Toll slowly.

“ Then my foes shall sleek their pride, soothing fair my
widowed bride

Whose sole sin was love of me.

“ With their words all smooth and sweet, they will front her
and entreat,”

Toll slowly.

“ And their purple pall will spread underneath her fainting
head

While her tears drop over it.

“ She will weep her woman's tears, she will pray her
woman's prayers,”—

Toll slowly.

“But her heart is young in pain, and her hopes will spring again

By the suntime of her years.

“Ah, sweet May ! ah, sweetest grief !—once I vowed thee my belief,”

Toll slowly.

“That thy name expressed thy sweetness,—May of poets, in completeness !

Now my May-day seemeth brief.”

All these silent thoughts did swim o'er his eyes grown strange and dim,—

Toll slowly.

Till his true men in the place, wished they stood there face to face

With the foe instead of him.

“One last oath, my friends that wear faithful hearts to do and dare !”—

Toll slowly.

“Tower must fall, and bride be lost !—swear me service worth the cost !”

—Bold they stood around to swear.

“Each man clasp my hand and swear, by the deed we failed in there,”

Toll slowly.

"Not for vengeance, not for right, will ye strike one blow
to-night!"

—Pale they stood around to swear,

"One last boon, young Ralph and Clare! faithful hearts to
do and dare!"—

Toll slowly.

"Bring that steed up from his stall, which she kissed before
you all!

Guide him up the turret-stair,

"Ye shall harness him aright, and lead upward to this
height."

Toll slowly.

"Once in love and twice in war, hath he borne me strong
and far,

He shall bear me far to-night!"

Then his men looked to and fro, when they heard him speak-
ing so,

Toll slowly.

—“‘Las! the noble heart,’ they thought,—‘he in sooth is
grief distraught.

Would we stood here with the foe!"

But a fire flashed from his eye, ‘twixt their thought and their
reply,—

Toll slowly.

"Have ye so much time to waste?—We who ride here,
must ride fast,
As we wish our foes to fly."

They have fetched the steed with care, in the harness he
did wear,

Toll slowly.

Past the court, and through the doors, across the rushes of
the floors,

But they goad him up the stair.

Then from out her bower chambre, did the Duchess May
repair.

Toll slowly.

"Tell me now what is your need," said the lady, "of this
steed,

That ye goad him up the stair?"

Calm she stood; unbodkined through, fell her dark hair to
her shoe,—

Toll slowly.

And the smile upon her face, ere she left the tiring-glass,
Had not time enough to go.

"Get thee back, sweet Duchess May! hope is gone like
yesterday,"—

Toll slowly.

“One half hour completes the breach ; and thy lord grows
wild of speech !

Get thee in, sweet lady, and pray.

“In the east tower, high’st of all, loud he cries for steed
from stall.”

Toll slowly.

“He would ride as far,” quoth he, “as for love and victory.
Though he rides the castle-wall.”

“And we fetched the steed from stall, up where never a hoof
did fall.”—

Toll slowly.

“Wifely prayer meets deathly need ! may the sweet Heav-
ens hear thee plead
If he rides the castle-wall.”

Low she dropt her head, and lower, till her hair coiled on
the floor,—

Toll slowly.

And tear after tear you heard fall distinct as any word
Which you might be listening for.

“Get thee in, thou soft ladye !—here, is never a place for
thee !”

Toll slowly.

“Braid thine hair and clasp thy gown, that thy beauty in
its moan
May find grace with Leigh of Leigh.”

She stood up in bitter case, with a pale yet steady face,
Toll slowly.

Like a statue thunderstruck, which, though quivering,
seems to look
Right against the thunder place.

And her foot trod in, with pride, her own tears i’ the stone
beside.—

Toll slowly.

“Go to, faithful friends, go to!—judge no more what ladies
do,—
No, nor how their lords may ride!”

Then the good steed’s rein she took, and his neck did kiss
and stroke :

Toll slowly.

Soft he neighed to answer her, and then followed up the
stair,
For the love of her sweet look.

Oh, and steeply, steeply wound up the narrow stair around!
Toll slowly.

Oh, and closely, closely speeding, step by step beside her treading,

Did he follow, meek as hound.

On the east tower, high'st of all,—there where never a hoof did fall,—

Toll slowly.

Out they swept a vision steady,—noble steed and lovely lady,

Calm as if in bower or stall.

Down she knelt at her lord's knee, and she looked up silently,—

Toll slowly.

And he kissed her twice and thrice, for that look within her eyes,

Which he could not bear to see.

Quoth he, "Get thee from this strife,—and the sweet saints bless thy life!"—

Toll slowly.

"In this hour, I stand in need of my noble red-roan steed,
But no more of my noble wife."

Quoth she, "Meekly have I done all thy biddings under sun;"

Toll slowly.

“But by all my womanhood, which is proved so, true and
good,
I will never do this one.

“Now by womanhood’s degree, and by wifehood’s verity,”
Toll slowly.

“In this hour if thou hast need of thy noble red-roan steed,
Thou hast also need of *me*.

“By this golden ring ye see on this lifted hand pardiè,”
Toll slowly.

“If, this hour, on castle-wall, can be room for steed from
stall,
Shall be also room for *me*.

“So the sweet saints with me be,” (did she utter solemnly)
Toll slowly.

“If a man, this eventide, on this castle wall will ride,
He shall ride the same with *me*.”

Oh, he sprang up in the selle, and he laughed out bitter-
well,
Toll slowly.

“Wouldst thou ride among the leaves, as we used on other
eves,
To hear chime a vesper-bell ?”

She clung closer to his knee—"Ay, beneath the cypress-tree!"—

Toll slowly.

"Mock me not, for otherwhere than along the greenwood fair,

Have I ridden fast with thee,

"Fast I rode with new-made vows, from my angry kinsman's house."

Toll slowly.

"What, and would you men should reck that I dared more for love's sake

As a bride than as a spouse?

"What, and would you it should fall, as a proverb, before all,"

Toll slowly.

"That a bride may keep your side while through castle-gate you ride,

Yet eschew the castle-wall?"

Ho! the breach yawns into ruin, and roars up against her suing,

Toll slowly.

With the inarticulate din, and the dreadful falling in—

Shrieks of doing and undoing!

Twice he wrung her hands in twain, but the small hands
closed again.

Toll slowly.

Back he reined the steed—back, back! but she trailed
along his track

With a frantic clasp and strain.

Evermore the foemen pour through the crash of window and
door,—

Toll slowly.

And the shouts of Leigh and Leigh, and the shrieks of
“kill!” and “flee!”

Strike up clear amid the roar.

Thrice he wrung her hands in twain—but they closed and
clung again,—

Toll slowly.

Wild she clung, as one, withstood, clasps a Christ upon the
rood,

In a spasm of deathly pain.

She clung wild and she clung mute, with her shuddering
lips half shut.

Toll slowly.

Her head fallen as half in swound,—hair and knee swept
on the ground,

She clung wild to stirrup and foot.

Back he reined his steed back-thrown on the slippery coping-stone.

Toll slowly.

Back the iron hoofs did grind on the battlement behind
Whence a hundred feet went down.

And his heel did press and goad on the quivering flank
bestrode,—

Toll slowly.

“Friends, and brothers, save my wife!—Pardon, sweet, in
change for life,—
But I ride alone to God.”

Straight as if the Holy name had upbreathed her like a
flame,

Toll slowly.

She upsprang, she rose upright,—in his selle she sate in
sight,

By her love she overcame.

And her head was on his breast, where she smiled as one
at rest,—

Toll slowly.

“Ring,” she cried, “O vesper-bell, in the beech-wood’s old
chapelle!

But the passing-bell rings best.”

They have caught out at the rein, which Sir Guy threw
loose—in vain,—

Toll slowly.

For the horse in stark despair, with his front hoofs poised
in air,

On the last verge rears amain.

Now he hangs, he rocks between, and his nostrils curdle
in!—

Toll slowly.

Now he shivers head and hoof—and the flakes of foam fall
off,

And his face grows fierce and thin!

And a look of human woe from his staring eyes did go,

Toll slowly.

And a sharp cry uttered he, in a foretold agony

Of the headlong death below,—

And, “Ring, ring, thou passing-bell,” still she cried, “i’ the
old chapelle !”—

Toll slowly.

Then back-toppling, crashing back—a dead weight flung
out to wrack,

Horse and riders overfell.

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west,

Toll slowly.

And I read this ancient Rhyme, in the churchyard, while the chime

Slowly tolled for one at rest.

The abeles moved in the sun, and the river smooth did run,

Toll slowly.

And the ancient Rhyme rang strange, with its passion and its change,

Here, where all done lay undone.

And beneath a willow-tree, I a little grave did see,

Toll slowly.

Where was graved,—HERE UNFILED, LIETH MAUD, A THREE-YEAR CHILD,

EIGHTEEN HUNDRED, FORTY-THREE.

Then, O spirits, did I say, ye who rode so fast that day,—

Toll slowly.

Did star-wheels and angel wings, with their holy winnowings,

Keep beside you all the way?

Though in passion ye would dash, with a blind and heavy
crash,

Toll slowly.

Up against the thick-bossed shield of God's judgment in the
field,—

Though your heart and brain were rash,—

Now, your will is all unwilled—now, your pulses are all
stilled !

Toll slowly.

Now, ye lie as meek and mild (whereso laid) as Maud the
child,

Whose small grave was lately filled.

Beating heart and burning brow, ye are very patient now,

Toll slowly.

And the children might be bold to pluck the king-cups from
your mould

Ere a month had let them grow.

And you let the goldfinch sing in the alder near in
spring,

Toll slowly.

Let her build her nest and sit all the three weeks out
on it,

Murmuring not at any thing.

In your patience ye are strong ; cold and heat ye take not wrong :

Toll slowly.

When the trumpet of the angel blows eternity's evangel,
Time will seem to you not long.

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west,

Toll slowly.

And I said in underbreath,—All our life is mixed with death,

And who knoweth which is best?

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west,

Toll slowly.

And I smiled to think God's greatness flowed around our incompleteness,—

Round our restlessness, His rest.





A CHILD'S GRAVE AT FLORENCE.

A.A.E.C.

BORN, JULY, 1848. DIED, NOVEMBER, 1849.

Of English blood, of Tuscan birth,
What country should we give her?
Instead of any on the earth,
The civic Heavens receive her.

And here, among the English tombs,
In Tuscan ground we lay her,
While the blue Tuscan sky endomes
Our English words of prayer.

A little child!—how long she lived,
By months, not years, is reckoned:
Born in one July, she survived
Alone to see a second.

Bright featured, as the July sun
Her little face still played in,

And splendours, with her birth begun,
Had had no time for fading.

So, Lucy, from those July hours,
No wonder we should call her ;
She looked such kinship to the flowers,
Was but a little taller.

A Tuscan Lily,—only white,
As Dante, in abhorrence
Of red corruption, wished aright
The lilies of his Florence.

We could not wish her whiter,—her
Who perfumed with pure blossom
The house !—a lovely thing to wear
Upon a mother's bosom !

This July creature thought perhaps
Our speech not worth assuming ;
She sate upon her parents' laps,
And mimicked the gnat's humming :

Said “father,” “mother,”—then, left off,
For tongues celestial, fitter.
Her hair had grown just long enough
To catch heaven's jasper-glitter.

Babes! Love could always hear and see
Behind the cloud that hid them.

"Let little children come to me,
And do not thou forbid them."

So, unforbidding, have we met,
And gently here have laid her,
Though winter is no time to get
The flowers that should o'erspread her.

We should bring pansies quick with spring,
Rose, violet, daffodilly,
And also, above every thing,
White lilies for our Lily.

Nay, more than flowers, this grave exacts,—
Glad, grateful attestations
Of her sweet eyes and pretty acts,
With calm renunciations.

Her very mother with light feet
Should leave the place too earthy,
Saying, "The angels have thee, Sweet,
Because we are not worthy."

But winter kills the orange buds,
The gardens in the frost are,

And all the heart dissolves in floods,
Remembering we have lost her !

Poor earth, poor heart,—too weak, too weak,
To miss the July shining !
Poor heart !—what bitter words we speak,
When God speaks of resigning !

Sustain this heart in us that faints,
Thou God, the self-existent !
We catch up wild at parting saints,
And feel thy Heaven too distant.

The wind that swept them out of sin,
Has ruffled all our vesture.
On the shut door that let them in,
We beat with frantic gesture,—

To us, us also—open straight !
The outer life is chilly—
Are *we* too, like the earth, to wait
Till next year for our Lily ?

—Oh, my own baby on my knees,
My leaping, dimpled treasure,
At every word I write like these,
Clasped close, with stronger pressure !

Too well my own heart understands,—
At every word beats fuller—
My little feet, my little hands,
And hair of Lily's colour !

—But God gives patience, Love learns strength,
And Faith remembers promise,
And Hope itself can smile at length
On other hopes gone from us.

Love, strong as Death, shall conquer Death,
Through struggle, made more glorious.
This mother stills her sobbing breath,
Renouncing, yet victorious.

Arms, empty of her child, she lifts,
With spirit unbereaven,—
“God will not take back all His gifts ;
My Lily's mine in heaven !

“Still mine ! maternal rights serene
Not given to another !
The crystal bars shine faint between
The souls of child and mother.

“Meanwhile,” the mother cries, “content !
Our love was well divided.

Its sweetness following where she went,
Its anguish stayed where I did.

“ Well done of God, to halve the lot,
And give her all the sweetness ;
To us, the empty room and cot,—
To her, the Heaven’s completeness.

“ To us, this grave—to her, the rows
The mystic palm-trees spring in.
To us, the silence in the house,—
To her, the choral singing.

“ For her, to gladden in God’s view,—
For us, to hope and bear on !—
Grow, Lily, in thy garden new,
Beside the rose of Sharon.

“ Grow fast in heaven, sweet Lily clipped,
In love more calm than this is,—
And may the angels dewy-lipped
Remind thee of our kisses !

“ While none shall tell thee of our tears,
These human tears now falling,
Till, after a few patient years,
One home shall take us all in.

“Child, father, mother—who, left out?
Not mother, and not father!—
And when, our dying couch about,
The natural mists shall gather,

“Some smiling angel close shall stand
In old Correggio’s fashion,
And bear a LILY in his hand,
For death’s ANNUNCIATION.”

—
ONLY A CURL.

FRIENDS of faces unknown and a land
Unvisited over the sea,
Who tell me how lonely you stand,
With a single gold curl in the hand
Held up to be looked at by me!—

While you ask me to ponder and say
What a father and mother can do,
With the bright yellow locks put away
Out of reach, beyond kiss, in the clay,
Where the violets press nearer than you:

Shall I speak like a poet, or run
 Into weak woman's tears for relief?
Oh, children ! I never lost one.
But my arm's round my own little son,
 And Love knows the secret of Grief.

And I feel what it must be and is
 When God draws a new angel so
Through the house of a man up to His,
With a murmur of music you miss,
 And a rapture of light you forego.

How you think, staring on at the door
 Where the face of your angel flashed in,
That its brightness, familiar before,
Burns off from you ever the more
 For the dark of your sorrow and sin.

"God lent him and takes him," you sigh . . .
—Nay, there let me break with your pain ;
God's generous in giving, say I,
And the thing which he gives, I deny
 That He ever can take back again.

He gives what he gives. I appeal
 To all who bear babes ! In the hour

When the veil of the body we feel
Rent round us, while torments reveal
The motherhood's advent in power,

And the babe cries,—have all of us known
By apocalypse (God being there,
Full in nature !) the child is *our own*,—
Life of life, love of love, moan of moan,
Through all changes, all times, everywhere.

He's ours, and for ever. Believe,
O father ! O mother, look back
To the first love's assurance ! To give
Means, with God, not to tempt or deceive
With a cup thrust in Benjamin's sack.

He gives what he gives : be content.
He resumes nothing given,—be sure.
God lend ?—where the usurers lent
In His temple, indignant he went
And scourged away all those impure.

He lends not, but gives to the end,
As He loves to the end. If it seem
That He draws back a gift, comprehend
'Tis to add to it rather . . amend,
And finish it up to your dream,—

Or keep . . . as a mother may toys

Too costly, though given by herself,
Till the room shall be stiller from noise,
And the children more fit for such joys,

Kept over their heads on the shelf.

So look up, friends ! You who indeed

Have possessed in your house a sweet piece
Of the Heaven which men strive for, must need
Be more earnest than others are, speed

Where they loiter, persist where they cease.

You know how one angel smiles there,

Then, courage ! 'Tis easy for you
To be drawn by a single gold hair
Of that curl, from earth's storm and despair
To the safe place above us. Adieu !



THE ROMANCE OF THE SWAN'S NEST.

LITTLE Ellie sits alone
'Mid the beeches of a meadow,
By a stream-side on the grass,



And the trees are showering down
Doubles of their leaves in shadow,
On her shining hair and face.

She has thrown her bonnet by,
And her feet she has been dipping
In the shallow water's flow.
Now she holds them nakedly
In her hands, all sleek and dripping,
While she rocketh to and fro.

Little Ellie sits alone,
And the smile she softly uses,
Fills the silence like a speech,
While she thinks what shall be done,—
And the sweetest pleasure chooses
For her future within reach.

Little Ellie in her smile
Chooses . . . “I will have a lover,
Riding on a steed of steeds !
He shall love me without guile,
And to *him* I will discover
The swan's nest among the reeds.

“ And the steed shall be red-roan,
And the lover shall be noble,
With an eye that takes the breath,
And the lute he plays upon,
Shall strike ladies into trouble,
As his sword strikes men to death.

"And the steed it shall be shod
All in silver, housed in azure,
And the mane shall swim the wind ;
And the hoofs along the sod
Shall flash onward and keep measure,
Till the shepherds look behind.

"But my lover will not prize
All the glory that he rides in,
When he gazes in my face.
He will say, 'O Love, thine eyes
Build the shrine my soul abides in,
And I kneel here for thy grace.'

"Then, ay, then—he shall kneel low,
With the red-roan steed anear him
Which shall seem to understand—
Till I answer, 'Rise and go !
For the world must love and fear him
Whom I gift with heart and hand.'

"Then he will arise so pale,
I shall feel my own lips tremble
With a *yes* I must not say,
Nathless maiden-brave, 'Farewell,'
I will utter, and dissemble—
'Light to-morrow with to-day.'

"Then he'll ride among the hills
To the wide world past the river,
There to put away all wrong ;
To make straight distorted wills,
And to empty the broad quiver
Which the wicked bear along.

"Three times shall a young foot-page
Swim the stream and climb the mountain
And kneel down beside my feet—
'Lo, my master sends this gage,
Lady, for thy pity's counting !
What wilt thou exchange for it ?'

"And the first time, I will send
A white rosebud for a guerdon.—
And the second time a glove :
But the third time—I may bend
From my pride, and answer—' Pardon,
If he comes to take my love.'

"Then the young foot-page will run—
Then my lover will ride faster,
Till he kneeleth at my knee :
'I am a duke's eldest son !
Thousand serfs do call me master,—
But, O Love, I love but *thee* !'

"He will kiss me on the mouth
Then, and lead me as a lover
Through the crowds that praise his deeds :



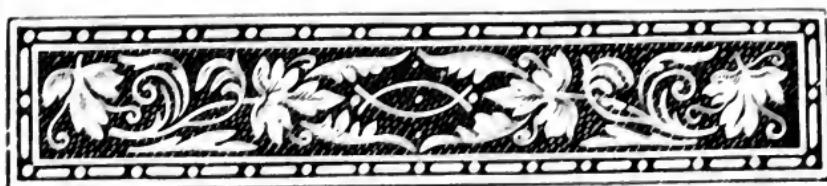
And, when soul-tied by one troth
Unto *him* I will discover
That swan's nest among the reeds."

* Little Ellie, with her smile
Not yet ended, rose up gaily,
Tied the bonnet, donned the shoe,
And went homeward, round a mile,
Just to see, as she did daily,
What more eggs were with the two.

Pushing through the elm-tree copse,
Winding up the stream, light-hearted,
Where the osier pathway leads—
Past the boughs she stoops—and stops,
Lo, the wild swan had deserted—
And a rat had gnawed the reeds.

Ellie went home sad and slow,
If she found the lover ever,
With his red-roan steed of steeds,
Sooth I know not ! but I know
She could never show him—never
That swan's nest among the reeds !





THE FOURFOLD ASPECT

When ye stood up in the house
With your little childish feet,
And, in touching Life's first shower,
First the touch of Love did meet,
Love and Nearness seeming one,
By the heartlight cast before,
And, of all Beloveds, none
Standing farther than the door !
Not a name being dear to thought
With its owner beyond call ;
Nor a face, unless it brought
Its own shadow to the wall ;
When the worst recorded change
Was of apple dropt from bough,
When love's sorrow seemed more strange
Than Love's treason can seem now. —
Then, the Loving took you up
Soft, upon their elder knees
Telling why the statues droop
Underneath the churchyard trees,

And how ye must lie beneath them
Through the winters long and deep,
Till the last trump overbreathe them,
And ye smile out of your sleep . . .

Oh, ye lifted up your head, and it seemed as if they
said

A tale of fairy ships
With a swan-wing for a sail!—
Oh, ye kissed their loving lips
For the merry, merry tale!—
So carelessly ye thought upon the Dead,

Soon ye read in solemn stories
Of the men of long ago—
Of the pale bewildering glories
Shining farther than we know,
Of the heroes with the laurel,
Of the poets with the bay,
Of the two worlds' earnest quarrel
For that beauteous Helena.
How Achilles at the portal
Of the tent, heard footsteps nigh,
And his strong heart, half-immortal,
Met the *keitai* with a cry.
How Ulysses left the sunlight
For the pale eidola race
Blank and passive through the dun light,

Staring blindly in his face,
How that true wife said to Portus,
With calm smile and wounded heart,



“Sweet, it hurts not!”—how Admetus
Saw his blessed one depart,
How King Arthur proved his mission,

And Sir Ronald wound his horn,
And at Sangreal's moony vision
Swords did bristle round like corn.
Oh, ye lifted up your head, and it seemed the while
ye read,
That this Death, then, must be found
A Valhalla for the crowned,
The heroic who prevail.
None, be sure, can enter in
Far below a paladin
Of a noble, noble tale !
So awfully ye thought upon the Dead.

Ay, but soon ye woke up shrieking,—
As a child that wakes at night
From a dream of sisters speaking
In a garden's summer-light,—
That wakes, starting up and bounding,
In a lonely, lonely bed,
With a wall of darkness round him.
Stifling black about his head !—
And the full sense of your mortal
Rushed upon you deep and loud,
And ye heard the thunder hurtle
From the silence of the cloud !
Funeral-torches at your gateway
Threw a dreadful light within.

All things changed ! you rose up straightway

And saluted Death and Sin.

Since,—your outward man has rallied,

And your eye and voice grown bold—

Yet the Sphinx of Life stands pallid,

With her saddest secret told,

Happy places have grown holy.

If ye went where once ye went,

Only tears would fall down slowly,

As at solemn sacrament.

Merry books, once read for pastime,

If ye dared to read again,

Only memories of the last time

Would swim darkly up the brain.

Household names, which used to flutter

Through your laughter unawares,

God's divinest ye could utter

With less trembling in your prayers !

Ye have dropt adown your head, and it seems as

if ye tread

On your own hearts in the path

Ye are called to in His wrath,—

And your prayers go up in wail !

—“Dost Thou see, then, all our loss,

O Thou agonized on cross ?

Art thou reading all its tale ?”

So mournfully ye think upon the Dead.

Pray, pray, thou who also wepest,
And the drops will slacken so.
Weep, weep,—and the watch thou keepest,
With a quicker count will go.
Think,—the shadow on the dial
For the nature most undone,
Marks the passing of the trial,
Proves the presence of the sun.
Look, look up, in starry passion,
To the throne above the spheres !
Learn,—the spirit's gravitation
Still must differ from the tear's.
Hope,—with all the strength thou uses't
In embracing thy despair.
Love,—the earthly love thou lostest
Shall return to thee more fair.
Work,—make clear the forest-tangles
Of the wildest stranger-land.
Trust,—the blessèd deathly angels
Whisper, "Sabbath hours at hand !"
By the heart's wound when most gory,
By the longest agony,
Smile !—Behold, in sudden glory
The TRANFIGURED smiles on *thee*!
And ye lifted up your head, and it seemed as if He
said,
"My Belovèd, is it so ?

Have ye tasted of my woe ?
Of my Heaven ye shall not fail !”—
He stands brightly where the shade is,
With the keys of Death and Hades,
And there ends the mournful tale.—
So hopefully ye think upon the Dead.

THE VIRGIN MARY TO THE CHILD JESUS.

But see, the Virgin blest
Hath laid her babe to rest.

MILTON's *Hymn on the Nativity*.

SLEEP, sleep, mine Holy One !
My flesh, my Lord !—what name ? I do not know
A name that seemeth not too high or low,
Too far from me or heaven.
My Jesus, *that* is best ! that word being given
By the majestic angel whose command
Was softly as a man's beseeching said,
When I and all the earth appeared to stand
In the great overflow
Of light celestial from his wings and head.
Sleep, sleep, my saving One !

And art thou come for saving, baby-browed
And speechless Being—art thou come for saving ?

The palm that grows beside our door is bowed
By treadings of the low wind from the south,
A restless shadow through the chamber waving :
Upon its bough a bird sings in the sun ;
But Thou, with that close slumber on thy mouth,
Dost seem of wind and sun already weary.
Art come for saving, O my weary One ?

Perchance this sleep that shutteth out the dreary
Earth-sounds and motions, opens on Thy soul

High dreams on fire with God ;
High songs that make the pathways where they roll
More bright than stars do theirs ; and visions new
Of Thine eternal Nature's old abode.

Suffer this mother's kiss,
Best thing that earthly is,
To glide the music and the glory through,
Nor narrow in thy dream the broad uplifting
 Of any seraph wing.
Thus noiseless, thus. Sleep, sleep, my dreaming One !

The slumber of His lips meseems to run
Through *my* lips to mine heart,—to all its shifting
Of sensual life, bringing contrariousness
In a great calm. I feel, I could lie down
As Moses did, and die,*—and then live most.

* It is a Jewish tradition that Moses died of the kisses of God's lips.

I am 'ware of you, heavenly Presences,
That stand with your peculiar light unlost,
Each forehead with a high thought for a crown,
Unsunned i' the sunshine ! I am 'ware. Ye throw
No shade against the wall ! How motionless
Ye round me with your living statuary,
While through your whiteness, in and outwardly,
Continual thoughts of God appear to go,
Like light's soul in itself. I bear, I bear,
To look upon the dropt lids of your eyes,
Though their external shining testifies
To that beatitude within, which were
Enough to blast an eagle at his sun.
I fall not on my sad clay face before ye,—

I look on His. I know
My spirit which dilateth with the woe
 Of His mortality,
 May well contain your glory.
 Yea, drop your lids more low.
Ye are but fellow-worshippers with me !
 Sleep, sleep, my worshipped One !

We sate among the stalls at Bethlehem.
The dumb kine from their fodder turning them,
 Softened their hornèd faces
 To almost human gazes
 Toward the newly Born.

The simple shepherds from the star-lit brooks
 Brought visionary looks,
As yet in their astonished hearing rung
 The strange, sweet angel-tongue,
The magi of the East, in sandals worn,
 Knelt reverent, sweeping round,
With long pale beards, their gifts upon the ground,
 The incense, myrrh and gold
These baby hands were impotent to hold.
So, let all earthlies and celestials wait
 Upon thy royal state.
Sleep, sleep, my kingly One !

I am not proud—meek angels, ye invest
New meeknesses to hear such utterance rest
On mortal lips,—“I am not proud”—*not proud!*
Albeit in my flesh God sent his Son,
Albeit over Him my head is bowed
As others bow before Him, still mine heart
Bows lower than their knees. O centuries
That roll, in vision, your futurities
 My future grave athwart,—
Whose murmurs seem to reach me while I keep
 Watch o'er this sleep,—
Say of me as the Heavenly said—“Thou art
The blessedest of women!” - blessedest,
Not holiest, not noblest—no high name,

Whose height misplaced may pierce me like a shame,
When I sit meek in heaven !

For me, for me,

God knows that I am feeble like the rest—
I often wandered forth, more child than maiden,
Among the midnight hills of Galilee

Whose summits looked heaven-laden,
Listening to silence as it seemed to be
God's voice, so soft yet strong—so fain to press
Upon my heart as Heaven did on the height,
And waken up its shadows by a light,
And show its vileness by a holiness.
Then I knelt down most silent like the night,

Too self-renounced for fears,
Raising my small face to the boundless blue
Whose stars did mix and tremble in my tears.
God heard *them* falling after—with his dew.

So, seeing my corruption, can I see
This Incorruptible now born of me,
This fair new Innocence no sun did chance
To shine on, (for even Adam was no child)
Created from my nature all defiled,
This mystery, from out mine ignorance,—
Nor feel the blindness, stain, corruption, more
Than others do, or *I* did heretofore?—
Can hands wherein such burden pure has been,

Not open with the cry "unclean, unclean,"
More oft than any else beneath the skies ?

 Ah King, ah Christ, ah son !
The kine, the shepherds, the abasèd wise
 Must all less lowly wait
 Than I, upon thy state.—
 Sleep, sleep, my kingly One !

Art Thou a King, then ?—Come, his universe,
 Come, crown me Him a King !
Pluck rays from all such stars as never fling
 Their light where fell a curse,
And make a crowning for this kingly brow !—
What is my word ?—Each empyreal star
 Sits in a sphere afar
 In shining ambuscade.
 The child-brow, crowned by none,
 Keeps its unchildlike shade.
 Sleep, sleep, my crownless One !

Unchildlike shade !—No other babe doth wear
An aspect very sorrowful, as thou.—
No small babe-smiles, my watching heart has seen,
To float like speech the speechless lips between.
No dovelike cooing in the golden air,
No quick short joys of leaping babyhood.

Alas, our earthly good
 In heaven thought evil, seems too good for Thee :
 Yet sleep, my weary One !

And then the drear sharp tongue of prophecy,
 With the dread sense of things which shall be done,
 Doth smite me inly, like a sword ! a sword ?—
(That "smites the Shepherd.") Then, I think aloud,
 The words "despised,"—"rejected," - every word
 Recoiling into darkness as I view

The DARLING on my knee.
 Bright angels,—move not !—lest ye stir the cloud
 Betwixt my soul and His futurity !
 I must not die, with mother's work to do,
 And could not live—and see.

It is enough to bear
 This image still and fair—
 This holier in sleep,
 Than a saint at prayer :
 This aspect of a child
 Who never sinned or smiled ;
 This Presence in an infant's face ;
 This sadness most like love,
 This love than love more deep,
 This weakness like omnipotence,

It is so strong to move.
Awful is this watching place,
Awful what I see from hence—
A king, without regalia,
A God, without the thunder,
A child, without the heart for play ;
Ay, a Creator, rent asunder
From his first glory and cast away
On His own world, for me alone
. To hold in hands created, crying—Son !

That tear fell not on thee,
Beloved, yet thou stirrest in thy slumber !
THOU, stirring not for glad sounds out of number
Which through the vibratory palm-trees run
From summer wind and bird,
So quickly hast thou heard
A tear fall silently ?—
Wak'st thou, O loving One ?—





THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN.

"Φεῦ, Φεῦ, τι πρισδερκεσθε μ' ομμασιν. τεκνα."

MEDEA.

Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
 Ere the sorrow comes with years ?
 They are leaning their young heads against their mothers,
 And *that* cannot stop their tears.
 The young lambs are bleating in the meadows,
 The young birds are chirping in the nest,
 The young fawns are playing with the shadows,
 The young flowers are blowing toward the west—
 But the young, young children, O my brothers,
 They are weeping bitterly !
 They are weeping in the playtime of the others,
 In the country of the free.

Do you question the young children in the sorrow,
 Why their tears are falling so ?
 The old man may weep for his to-morrow
 Which is lost in Long Ago.

The old tree is leafless in the forest,
The old year is ending in the frost,
The old wound, if stricken, is the sorest,
The old hope is hardest to be lost.
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
Do you ask them why they stand
Weeping sore before the bosoms of their mothers,
In our happy Fatherland?

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
And their looks are sad to see,
For the man's hoary anguish draws and presses
Down the cheeks of infancy.
"Your old earth," they say, "is very dreary ;
Our young feet," they say, "are very weak !
Few paces have we taken, yet are weary--
Our grave-rest is very far to seek.
Ask the aged why they weep, and not the children ;
For the outside earth is cold ;
And we young ones stand without, in our bewildering,
And the graves are for the old.

"True," say the children, "it may happen
That we die before our time.
Little Alice died last year—her grave is shapen
Like a snowball, in the rime.

We looked into the pit prepared to take her.

Was no room for any work in the close clay !
From the sleep wherein she lieth, none will wake her,
Crying, ‘Get up, little Alice ! it is day.’
If you listen by that grave, in sun and shower,
With your ear down, little Alice never cries.
Could we see her face, be sure we should not know her,
For the smile has time for growing in her eyes.
And merry go her moments, lulled and stilled in
The shroud by the kirk-chime !
It is good when it happens,” say the children,
“That we die before our time.”

Alas, alas, the children ! they are seeking
Death in life, as best to have.
They are binding up their hearts away from breaking,
With a cerement from the grave.
Go out, children, from the mine and from the city,
Sing out, children, as the little thrushes do.
Pluck your handfuls of the meadow-cowslips pretty,
Laugh aloud, to feel your fingers let them through !
But they answer, “Are your cowslips of the meadows
Like our weeds anear the mine ?
Leave us quiet in the dark of the coal-shadows
From your pleasures fair and fine !

“ For oh,” say the children, “ we are weary,
And we cannot run or leap.

If we cared for any meadows, it were merely
 To drop down in them and sleep.
Our knees tremble sorely in the stooping,
 We fall upon our faces, trying to go ;
And, underneath our heavy eyelids drooping,
 The reddest flower would look as pale as snow.
For, all day, we drag our burden tiring
 Through the coal-dark, underground—
Or, all day we drive the wheels of iron
 In the factories, round and round.

“For, all day, the wheels are droning, turning,—
 Their wind comes in our faces,—
’Till our hearts turn,—our head, with pulses burning,
 And the walls turn in their places.
Turns the sky in the high window blank and reeling,
 Turns the long light that drops adown the wall,
Turn the black flies that crawl along the ceiling,
 All are turning, all the day, and we with all.
And all day, the iron wheels are droning,
 And sometimes we could pray,
‘O ye wheels,’ (breaking out in a mad moaning)
 ‘Stop ! be silent for to-day !’”

Aye ! be silent ! Let them hear each other breathing
 For a moment, mouth to mouth !
Let them touch each other’s hands in a fresh wreathing
 Of their tender human youth !

Let them feel that this cold metallic motion
Is not all the life God fashions or reveals.



Let them prove their living souls against the notion
That they live in you, or under you, O wheels!—

Still, all day, the iron wheels go onward,
Grinding life down from its mark ;
And the children's souls, which God is calling sunward,
Spin on blindly in the dark.

Now tell the poor young children, O my brothers,
To look up to Him and pray ;
So the blessèd One who blesseth all the others,
Will bless them another day.
They answer, "Who is God that he should hear us,
While the rushing of the iron wheel is stirred ?
When we sob aloud, the human creatures near us,
Pass by, hearing not, or answer not a word.
And *we* hear not (for the wheels in their resounding)
Strangers speaking at the door.
Is it likely God, with angels singing round him,
Hears our weeping any more ?

" Two words, indeed, of praying we remember,
And at midnight's hour of harm,
" Our Father," looking upward in the chamber,
We say softly for a charm *

* A fact rendered pathetically historical by Mr. Horne's report of his commission. The name of the poet of "Orion" and "Cosmo de' Medici" has, however, a change of associations, and comes in time to remind me that we have some noble poetic heat of literature still,—however open to the reproach of being somewhat gelid in our humanity.—1844.

We know no other words, except "Our Father,"
And we think that, in some pause of angels' song,
God may pluck them with the silence sweet to gather,
And hold both within his right hand which is strong.
"Our Father!" If He heard us, He would surely
(For they call him good and mild)
Answer, smiling down the steep world very purely,
"Come and rest with me, my child."

"But no!" say the children, weeping faster,
"He is speechless as a stone,
And they tell us, of His image is the master
Who commands us to work on.
Go to!" say the children,—"up in Heaven,
Dark, wheel-like, turning clouds are all we find.
Do not mock us; grief has made us unbelieving—
We look up for God, but tears have made us blind."
Do you hear the children weeping and disproving,
O my brothers, what ye preach?
For God's possible is taught by his world's loving,
And the children doubt of each.

And well may the children weep before you!
They are weary ere they run.
They have never seen the sunshine, nor the glory
Which is brighter than the sun.
They know the grief of man, without his wisdom.

They sink in man's despair, without its calm ;
Are slaves, without the liberty in Christdom,

Are martyrs, by the pang without the palm,—
Are worn, as if with age, yet unretrievingly

The harvest of its memories cannot reap,—
Are orphans of the earthly love and heavenly.

Let them weep ! let them weep !

They look up, with their pale and sunken faces,

And their look is dread to see,

For they mind you of their angels in high places.

With eyes turned on Deity !—

“ How long,” they say, “ how long, O cruel nation,

Will you stand, to move the world, on a child's heart,—
Stamp down with a mailed heel its palpitation,

And tread onward to your throne amid the mart ?

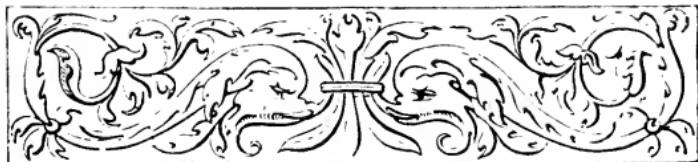
Our blood splashes upward, O gold-heaper,

And your purple shows your path !

But the child's sob in the silence curses deeper

Than the strong man in his wrath.





THE DESERTED GARDEN.

I MIND me in the days departed,
How often underneath the sun
With childish bounds I used to run
To a garden long deserted.

The beds and walks were vanished quite ;
And wheresoe'er had struck the spade,
The greenest grasses Nature laid,
To sanctify her right.

I called the place my wilderness,
For no one entered there but I.
The sheep looked in, the grass to espy,
And passed it ne'ertheless.

The trees were interwoven wild,
And spread their boughs enough about
To keep both sheep and shepherd out,
But not a happy child.

Adventurous joy it was for me!
I crept beneath the boughs, and found
A circle smooth of mossy ground
Beneath a poplar-tree.

Old garden rose-trees hedged it in,
Bedropt with roses waxen white
Well satisfied with dew and light
And careless to be seen.

Long years ago it might befall,
When all the garden flowers were trim,
The grave old gardener prided him
On these the most of all.

Some lady, stately overmuch,
Here moving with a silken noise,
Has blushed beside them at the voice
That likened her to such.

And these, to make a diadem,
She often may have plucked and twined,
Half-smiling as it came to mind
That few would look at *them*.

Oh, little thought that lady proud,
A child would watch her fair white rose,

When buried lay her whiter brows,
And silk was changed for shroud !--

Nor thought that gardener, (full of scorns
For men unlearned and simple phrase,)
A child would bring it all its praise,
By creeping through the thorns !

To me upon my low moss seat,
Though never a dream the roses sent
Of science or love's compliment,
I ween they smelt as sweet.

It did not move my grief to see
The trace of human step departed.
Because the garden was deserted,
The blither place for me !

Friends, blame me not ! a narrow ken,
Has childhood 'twixt the sun and sward :
We draw the moral afterward--
We feel the gladness then.

And gladdest hours for me did glide
In silence at the rose-tree wall.
A thrush made gladness musical
Upon the other side.

Nor he nor I did e'er incline
To peck or pluck the blossoms white
How should I know but roses might
Lead lives as glad as mine ?

To make my hermit-home complete,
I brought clear water from the spring
Praised in its own low murmuring,—
And cresses glossy wet.

And so, I thought, my likeness grew
(Without the melancholy tale)
To “gentle hermit of the dale,”
And Angelina too.

For oft I read within my nook
Such minstrel stories ; till the breeze
Made sounds poetic in the trees,—
And then I shut the book.

If I shut this wherein I write
I hear no more the wind athwart
Those trees,—nor feel that childish heart
Delighting in delight.

My childhood from my life is parted,
My footstep from the moss which drew

Its fairy circle round : anew
The garden is deserted.

Another thrush may there rehearse
The madrigals which sweetest are ;
No more for me !—myself afar
Do sing a sadder verse.

Ah me, ah me ! when erst I lay
In that child's-nest so greenly wrought,
I laughed unto myself and thought
“The time will pass away.”

And still I laughed, and did not fear
But that, whene'er was passed away
The childish time, some happier play
My womanhood would cheer.

I knew the time would pass away,
And yet, beside the rose-tree wall,
Dear God, how seldom, if at all,
Did I look up to pray !

*

The time is past ;—and now that grows
The cypress high among the trees,
And I behold white sepulchres
As well as the white rose,—

When graver, meeker thoughts are given,
And I have learnt to lift my face,
Reminded how earth's greenest place
The colour draws from heaven,—

It something saith for earthly pain,
But more for Heavenly promise free,
That I who was, would shrink to be
That happy child again.

HECTOR IN THE GARDEN.

NINE years old ! The first of any
Seem the happiest years that come.
Yet when *I* was nine, I said
No such word !—I thought instead
That the Greeks had used as many
In besieging Ilium.

Nine green years had scarcely brought me
To my childhood's haunted spring.
I had life, like flowers and bees
In betwixt the country trees,
And the sun the pleasure taught me
Which he teacheth every thing.

If the rain fell, there was sorrow,
 Little head leant on the pane,
 Little finger drawing down it
 The long trailing drops upon it,
And the "Rain, rain, come to-morrow,"
 Said for charm against the rain.

Such a charm was right Canidian
 Though you meet it with a jeer !
 If I said it long enough,
 Then the rain hummed dimly off,
And the thrush with his pure Lydian
 Was left only to the ear ;

And the sun and I together
 Went a-rushing out of doors !
 We, our tender spirits, drew
 Over hill and dale in view,
Glimmering hither, glimmering thither,
 In the footsteps of the showers.

Underneath the chestnuts dripping,
 Through the grasses wet and fair,
 Straight I sought my garden-ground.
 With the laurel on the mound,
And the pear-tree oversweeping
 A side-shadow of green air.

In the garden lay supinely
A huge giant wrought of spade !
Arms and legs were stretched at length,
In a passive giant strength,—
The fine meadow-turf, cut finely,
Round them laid and interlaid.

Call him Hector, son of Priam !
Such his title and degree.
With my rake I smoothed his brow,
Both his cheeks I weeded through,
But a rhymer such as I am,
Scarce can sing his dignity.

Eyes of gentianellas azure,
Staring, winking at the skies.
Nose of gillyflowers and box.
Scented grasses put for locks,
Which a little breeze, at pleasure,
Set a-waving round his eyes.

Brazen helm of daffodillies,
With a glitter toward the light.
Purple violets for the mouth,
Breathing perfumes west and south ;
And a sword of flashing lilies,
Holden ready for the fight.

And a breastplate made of daisies,
Closely fitting, lea on leaf.
Periwinkles interlaced
Drawn for belt about the waist ;
While the brown bees, humming praises,
Shot their arrows round the chief.

And who knows, (I sometimes wondered,)
If the disembodied soul
Of old Hector, once of Troy,
Might not take a dreary joy
Here to enter—if it thundered,
Rolling up the thunder-roll ?

Rolling this way from Troy-ruin,
In this body rude and rife
Just to enter, and take rest
'Neath the daisies of the breast—
They, with tender roots, renewing
His heroic heart to life ?

Who could know ? I sometimes started
At a motion or a sound !
Did his mouth speak—naming Troy,
With an *οτοτοτοτοτοι* ?
Did the pulse of the Strong-hearted
Make the daises tremble round ?

It was hard to answer, often :

 But the birds sang in the tree—
 But the little birds sang bold
 In the pear-tree green and old,
And my terror seemed to soften
 Through the courage of their glee.

Oh, the birds, the tree, the ruddy
 And white blossoms, sleek with rain !
Oh, my garden, rich with pansies !
 Oh, my childhood's bright romances !
All revive, like Hector's body,
 And I see them stir again !

And despite life's changes—chances,
 And despite the deathbell's toll,
They press on me in full seeming !
 Help, some angel ! stay this dreaming !
As the birds sang in the branches,
 Sing God's patience through my soul !

That no dreamer, no negleter
 Of the present's work unsped,
I may wake up and be doing,
 Life's heroic ends pursuing,
Though my past is dead as Hector,
 And though Hector is twice dead.



TO BETTINE,

THE CHILD-FRIEND OF GOETHE.

“I have the second sight, Goethe!”—*Letters of a child.*

BETTINE, friend of Goethe,
Hadst thou the second sight—
Upturning worship and delight
With such a loving duty
To his grand face, as women will,
The childhood 'neath thine eyelids still ?

Before his shrine to doom thee
Using the same child's smile
That heaven and earth, beheld erewhile
For the first time, won from thee,
Ere star and flower grew dim and dead,
Save at his feet and o'er his head ?

Digging thine heart and throwing
Away its childhood's gold,
That so its woman-depth might hold
His spirit's overflowing.
For surging souls, no worlds can bound,
Their channel in the heart have found.

O child, to change appointed,
Thou hadst not second sight !
What eyes the future view aright,
Unless by tears anointed ?
Yea, only tears themselves can show
The burning ones that have to flow.

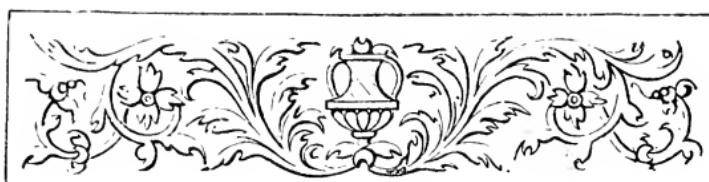
O woman, deeply loving,
Thou hadst not second sight !
The star is very high and bright,
And none can see it moving.
Love looks around, below, above,
Yet all his prophecy is—love.

The bird thy childhood's playing
Sent onward o'er the sea,
Thy dove of hope came back to thee
Without a leaf. Art laying
Its wet cold wing no sun can dry,
Still in thy bosom secretly ?

Our Goethe's friend, Bettine,
I have the second sight !
The stone upon his grave is white,
The funeral stone between ye ;
And in thy mirror thou hast viewed
Some change as hardly understood.

Where's childhood ? where is Goethe ?
The tears are in thine eyes.
Nay, thou shalt yet reorganize
Thy maidenhood of beauty
In his own glory, which is smooth
Of wrinkles and sublime in youth

The poet's arms have wound thee,
He breathes upon thy brow,
He lifts thee upward in the glow
Of his great genius round thee,—
The child-like poet undefiled
Preserving evermore THE CHILD.



A SONG AGAINST SINGING.

TO E. J. H.

THEY bid me sing to thee,
 Thou golden-haired and silver-voicéd child,—
 With lips by no worse sigh than sleep's defiled,
 With eyes unknowing how tears dim the sight,
 And feet all trembling at the new delight
 Treaders of earth to be !

Ah no ! the lark may bring
 A song to thee from out the morning cloud,
 The merry river from its lilies bowed,
 The brisk rain from the trees, the lucky wind,
 That half doth make its music, half doth find,—
 But *I*—I may not sing.

How could I think it right,
 New-comer on our earth as, Sweet, thou art,
 To bring a verse from out an human heart
 Made heavy with accumulated tears,
 And cross with such amount of weary years
 Thy day-sum of delight ?

Even if the verse were said,
Thou, who wouldest clap thy tiny hands to hear
The wind or rain, gay bird or river clear,
Wouldst, at that sound of sad humanities,
Upturn thy bright uncomprehending eyes
And bid me play instead.

Therefore no song of mine,—
But prayer in place of singing; prayer that would
Commend thee to the new-creating God,
Whose gift is childhood's heart without its stain
Of weakness, ignorance, and changing vain—
That gift of God be thine!

So wilt thou aye be young,
In lovelier childhood than thy shining brow
And pretty winning accents make thee now.
Yea, sweeter than this scarce articulate sound
(How sweet!) of “father,” “mother,” shall be found
The ABBA on thy tongue.

And so, as years shall chase
Each other's shadows, thou wilt less resemble
Thy fellows of the earth who toil and tremble,
Than him thou seest not, thine angel bold
Yet meek, whose ever-lifted eyes behold
The Ever-loving's face.



SLEEPING AND WATCHING.

SLEEP on, baby, on the floor,
 Tired of all the playing !
 Sleep with smile the sweeter for
 That you dropped away in !
 On your curls' full roundness, stand
 Golden lights serenely.
 One cheek, pushed out by the hand,
 Folds the dimple inly.
 Little head and little foot
 Heavy laid for pleasure,
 Underneath the lids half shut,
 Slants the shining azure.—
 Open soul in noonday sun,
 So, you lie and slumber !
 Nothing evil having done,
 Nothing can encumber.

I, who cannot sleep as well,
 Shall I sigh to view you ?

Or sigh further to foretell
All that may undo you?
Nay, keep smiling, little child,
Ere the sorrow neareth.
I will smile too! patience mild
Pleasure's token weareth.
Nay, keep sleeping before loss.
I shall sleep, though losing!
As by cradle, so by cross,
Sure is the reposing.

And God knows who sees us twain,
Child at childish leisure,
I am near as tired of pain
As you seem of pleasure.
Very soon too, by His grace
Gently wrapt around me,
Shall I show as calm a face,
Shall I sleep as soundly.
Differing in this, that you
Clasp your playthings, sleeping,
While my hand shall drop the few
Given to my keeping.
Differing in this, that I
Sleeping shall be colder,
And in waking presently,
Brighter to beholder.

Differing in this beside
(Sleeper, have you heard me ?
Do you move, and open wide
Eyes of wonder toward me !) —
That while you I thus recall
From your sleep, I solely,
Me from mine an angel shall,
With reveille holy.

—

THE LOST BOWER.

In the pleasant orchard closes,
“God bless all our gains,” say we ;
But “May God bless all our losses,”
Better suits with our degree.

Listen gentle—ay, and simple ! listen children on the knee !

Green the land is where my daily
Steps in jocund childhood played,
Dimpled close with hill and valley,
Dappled very close with shade ;
Summer-snow of apple blossoms running up from glade to
glade.

There is one hill I see nearer
In my vision of the rest ;

And a little wood seems clearer
As it climbeth from the west,
Sideway from the tree-locked valley, to the airy upland
crest.

Small the wood is, green with hazels,
And, completing the ascent,
Where the wind blows and sun dazzles
Thrills in leafy tremblement,
Like a heart that, after climbing, beateth quickly through
content.

Not a step the wood advances
O'er the open hill-top's bound.
There, in green arrest, the branches
See their image on the ground :
You may walk beneath them smiling, glad with sight and
glad with sound.

For you harken on your right hand,
How the birds do leap and call
In the greenwood, out of sight and
Out of reach and fear of all ;
And the squirrels crack the filberts through their cheerful
madrigal.

On your left, the sheep are cropping
The slant grass and daisies pale,

And five apple-trees stand dropping
 Separate shadows toward the vale,
 Over which in choral silence, the hills look you their "All
 hail!"

Far out, kindled by each other,
 Shining hills on hills arise,
 Close as brother leans to brother
 When they press beneath the eyes
 Of some father praying blessings from the gifts of paradise.

While beyond, above them mounted,
 And above their woods also,
 Malvern hills, for mountains counted
 Not unduly, loom a-row—
 Keepers of Piers Plowman's visions through the sunshine
 and the snow.*

Yet, in childhood, little prized I
 That fair walk and far survey.
 'Twas a straight walk unadvised by
 The least mischief worth a nay ;
 Up and down—as dull as grammar on the eve of holiday.

But the wood, all close and clenching
 Bough in bough and root in root,—

* The Malvern Hills of Worcestershire are the scene of Langland's visions, and thus present the earliest classic ground of English poetry.

No more sky (for overbranching)
At your head than at your foot,—

Oh, the wood drew me within it, by a glamour past dispute.

Few and broken paths showed through it,
Where the sheep had tried to run,—
Forced with snowy wool to strew it
Round the thickets, when anon

They with silly thorn-pricked noses, bleated back into the sun.

But my childish heart beat stronger
Than those thickets dared to grow :
I could pierce them ! *I* could longer
Travel on, methought, than so.

Sheep for sheep-paths ! braver children climb and creep
where they would go.

And the poets wander, said I,
Over places all as rude.
Bold Rinaldo's lovely lady
Sate to meet him in a wood

Rosalinda, like a fountain, laughed out pure with solitude.

And if Chaucer had not travelled
Through a forest by a well,

He had never dreamt nor marvelled
At those ladies fair and fell
Who lived smiling without loving in their island-citadel.

Thus I thought of the old singers,
And took courage from their song,
Till my little struggling fingers
Tore asunder gyve and thong
Of the brambles which entrapped me, and the barrier
branches strong.

On a day, such pastime keeping,
With a fawn's heart debonair,
Under-crawling, overleaping
Thorns that prick and boughs that bear,
I stood suddenly astonished—I was gladdened unaware.

From the place I stood in, floated
Back the covert dim and close,
And the open ground was coated
Carpet-smooth with grass and moss,
And the blue-bell's purple presence signed it worthily across.

Here a linden-tree stood, brightning
All adown its silver rind ;
For as some trees draw the lightning,

So this tree, unto my mind,
Drew to earth the blessed sunshine from the sky where it
was shrined.



Tall the linden-tree, and near it
An old hawthorn also grew ;

And wood-ivy like a spirit
Hovered dimly round the two,
Shaping thence that bower of beauty which I sing of thus
to you.

"Twas a bower for garden fitter
Than for any woodland wide.
Though a fresh and dewy glitter
Struck it through from side to side,
Shaped and shaven was the freshness, as by garden-cunning
plied.

Oh, a lady might have come there,
Hooded fairly like her hawk,
With a book or lute in summer,
And a hope of sweeter talk—
Listening less to her owl music than for footsteps on the
walk.

But that bower appeared a marvel
In the wildness of the place ;
With such seeming art and travail,
Finely fixed and fitted was
Leaf to leaf, the dark-green ivy, to the summit from the
base.

And the ivy veined and glossy
Was enwrought with eglantine ;
And the wild hop fibred closely,

And the large-leaved columbine,
Arch of door and window mullion, did right sylvanly
entwine.

Rose-trees either side the door were
Growing lithe and growing tall,
Each one set a summer warder
For the keeping of the hall,—
With a red rose and a white rose, leaning, nodding at the
wall.

As I entered—mosses hushing
Stole all noises from my foot ;
And a green elastic cushion,
Clasped within the linden's root,
Took me in a chair of silence very rare and absolute.

All the floor was paved with glory,
Greenly, silently inlaid,
(Through quick motions made before me)
With fair counterparts in shade
Of the fair serrated ivy-leaves which slanted overhead.

“ Is such pavement in a palace ? ”
So I questioned in my thought.
The sun, shining through the chalice
Of the red rose hung without,
Threw within a red libation, like an answer to my doubt.

At the same time, on the linen
Of my childish lap there fell
Two white may-leaves, downward winning
Through the ceiling's miracle,
From a blossom, like an angel, out of sight yet blessing
well

Down to floor and up to ceiling
Quick I turned my childish face,
With an innocent appealing
For the secret of the place
To the trees, which surely knew it, in partaking of the
grace.

Where's no foot of human creature,
How could reach a human hand?
And if this be work of nature,
Why has nature turned so bland,
Breaking off from other wild work? It was hard to understand.

Was she weary of rough-doing,—
Of the bramble and the thorn?
Did she pause in tender rueing
Here of all her sylvan scorn?
Or, in mock of art's deceiving, was the sudden mildness
worn?

Or could this same bower (I fancied)
Be the work of Dryad strong,

Who, surviving all that chanced
In the world's old pagan wrong,
Lay hid, feeling in the woodland on the last true poet's song ?

Or was this the house of fairies,
Left, because of the rough ways,
Unassailed by Ave Marys
Which the passing pilgrim prays,
And beyond St. Catherine's chiming on the blessed Sabbath
days ?

So, young muser, I sate listening
To my fancy's wildest word.
On a sudden, through the glistening
Leaves around, a little stirred,
Came a sound, a sense of music, which was rather felt than
heard.

Softly, finely, it inwound me ;
From the world it shut me in,—
Like a fountain, falling round me,
Which with silver waters thin
Clips a little water Naiad sitting smilingly within.

Whence the music came, who knoweth ?
I know nothing. But indeed
Pan or Faunus never bloweth
So much sweetness from a reed
Which has sucked the milk of waters at the oldest riverhead.

Never lark the sun can waken
With such sweetness ! when the lark,
The high planets overtaking
In the half-evanished Dark,

Casts his singing to their singing, like an arrow to the mark.

Never nightingale so singeth.
Oh, she leans on thorny tree,
And her poet-song she flingeth
Over pain to victory !

Yet she never sings such music,—or she sings it not to me.

Never blackbirds, never thrushes,
Nor small finches sing as sweet,
When the sun strikes through the bushes
To their crimson clinging feet,

And their pretty eyes look sideways to the summer heavens
complete.

If it *were* a bird, it seemèd
Most like Chaucer's, which, in sooth,
He of green and azure dreamèd,
While it sate in spirit-ruth

On that bier of a crowned lady, singing nigh her silent
mouth.

If it *were* a bird !—ah, skeptic,
Give me “yea” or give me “nay”—

Though my soul were nympholeptic,
As I heard that virëlay,
You may stoop your pride to pardon, for my sin is far away.

I rose up in exaltation
And an inward trembling heat,
And (it seemed) in geste of passion
Dropped the music to my feet
Like a garment rustling downwards!—such a silence followed it.

Heart and head beat through the quiet
Full and heavily, though slower.
In the song, I think, and by it,
Mystic Presences of Power
Had up-snatched me to the Timeless, then returned me to the Hour.

In a child-abstraction lifted,
Straightway from the bower I past,
Foot and soul being dimly drifted
Through the greenwood, till, at last,
In the hill-top's open sunshine I all consciously was cast.

Face to face with the true mountains
I stood silently and still,
Drawing strength from fancy's dauntlings,
From the air about the hill,
And from Nature's open mercies, and most debonair goodwill.

Oh, the golden-hearted daisies
Witnessed there, before my youth,
To the truth of things with praises
Of the beauty of the truth,

And I woke to Nature's real, laughing joyfully for both.

And I said within me, laughing,
I have found a bower to-day,
A green lusus—fashioned half in
Chance, and half in Nature's play—

And a little bird sings nigh it, I will nevermore missay.

Henceforth, *I* will be the fairy
Of this bower not built by one ;
I will go there, sad or merry,
With each morning's benison,

And the bird shall be my harper in the dream-hall I have
won.

So I said. But the next morning,
(—Child, look up into my face—
'Ware, oh skeptic, of your scorning !
This is truth in its pure grace !)

The next morning, all had vanished, or my wandering missed
the place.

Bring an oath most sylvan holy,
And upon it swear me true—
By the wind-bells swinging slowly

Their mute curfews in the dew,
By the advent of the snow-drop, by the rosemary and rue,—



I affirm by all or any,
Let the cause be charm or chance,

That my wandering searches many
Missed the bower of my romance—

That I nevermore, upon it, turned my mortal countenance.

I affirm that, since I lost it,
Never bower has seemed so fair ;
Never Garden-creeper crossed it,
With so deft and brave an air—

Never bird sung in the summer, as I saw and heard them
there.

Day by day, with new desire,
Toward my wood I ran in faith,
Under leaf and over brier,
Through the thickets, out of breath—

Like the prince who rescued Beauty from the sleep as long
as death.

But his sword of mettle clashed
And his arm smote strong, I ween,
And her dreaming spirit flashed
Through her body's fair white screen,

And the light thereof might guide him up the cedar alleys
green.

But for me, I saw no splendour—
All my sword was my child-heart :
And the wood refused surrender

Of that bower it held apart,
Safe as Oedipus's grave-place, 'mid Colone's olive swart.

As Aladdin sought the basements
• His fair palace rose upon,
And the four-and-twenty casements
Which gave answers to the sun;
So, in wilderment of gazing I looked up, and I looked down

Years have vanished since as wholly
As the little bower did then;
And you call it tender folly
That such thoughts should come again?
Ah, I cannot change this sighing for your smiling, brother
men!

For this loss it did prefigure
Other loss of better good,
When my soul, in spirit-vigour
And in ripened womanhood,
Fell from visions of more beauty than an arbour in a wood.

I have lost—oh, many a pleasure,
Many a hope, and many a power—
Studious health, and merry leisure,
The first dew on the first flower!
But the first of all my losses was the losing of the bower.

I have lost the dream of Doing,
And the other dream of Done,
The first spring in the pursuing,
The first pride in the Begun,—

First recoil from incompletion, in the face of what is won—

Exaltations in the far light
Where some cottage only is ;
Mild dejections in the starlight,
Which the sadder-hearted miss ;

And the child-cheek blushing scarlet for the very shame of
bliss,

I have lost the sound child-sleeping
Which the thunder could not break ;
Something too of the strong leaping
Of the staglike heart awake,

Which the pale is low for keeping in the road it ought to
take.

Some respect to social fictions
Has been also lost by me :
And some generous genuflexions,
Which my spirit offered free

To the pleasant old conventions of our false humanity.

All my losses did I tell you,
Ye, perchance, would look away ;—
Ye would answer me, “ Farewell ! you

Make sad company to-day,
And your tears are falling faster than the bitter words you
say."

For God placed me like a dial
In the open ground with power,
And my heart had for its trial
All the sun and all the shower !

And I suffered many losses,—and my first was of the bower.

Laugh you ? If that loss of mine be
Of no heavy-seeming weight—
When the cone falls from the pine-tree,
The young children laugh thereat :

Yet the wind that struck it, riseth, and the tempest shall be
great.

One who knew me in my childhood
In the glamour and the game
Looking on me long and mild, would
Never know me for the same.

Come, unchanging recollections, were those changes over-
came.

By this couch I weakly lie on,
While I count my memories,—
Through the fingers which, still sighing,
I press closely on mine eyes.—

Clear as once beneath the sunshine, I behold the bower arise.

Springs the linden-tree as greenly,
Stroked with light adown its rind ;
And the ivy-leaves serenely
Each in either intertwined ;
And the rose-trees at the doorway, they have neither grown
nor pined.

From those overblown faint roses
Not a leaf appeareth shed,
And that little bud discloses
Not a thorn's-breadth more of red
For the winters and the summers which have passed me
overhead.

And that music overfloweth,
Sudden sweet, the sylvan eaves.
Thrush or nightingale—who knoweth ?
Fay or Faunus—who believes ?
But my heart still trembles in me, to the trembling of the
leaves.

Is the bower lost, then ? who sayeth
That the bower indeed is lost ?
Hark ! my spirit in it prayeth
Through the sunshine and the frost,—
And the prayer preserves it greenly, to the last and utter-
most.

Till another open for me
In God's Eden-land unknown,
With an angel at the doorway
White with gazing at His Throne,
And a saint's voice in the palm-trees, singing—"All is lost
. . . and *won!*"

A TALE OF VILLAFRANCA.

TOLD IN TUSCANY.

My little son, my Florentine,
Sit down beside my knee,
And I will tell you why the sign
Of joy which flushed our Italy
Has faded since but yesternight ;
And why your Florence of delight
Is mourning as you see.

A great man (who was crowned one day)
Imagined a great Deed :
He shaped it out of cloud and clay,
He touched it finely till the seed
Possessed the flower : from heart and brain
He fed it with large thoughts humane,
To help a people's need.

He brought it out into the sun—

They blessed it to his face :

“ O great pure Deed, that hast undone
So many bad and base !

O generous Deed, heroic Deed,
Come forth, be perfected, succeed,
Deliver by God’s grace.”

Then sovereigns, statesmen, north and south,

Rose up in wrath and fear,

And cried, protesting by one mouth,
“ What monster have we here ?

A great Deed at this hour of day ?

A great just Deed—and not for pay ?
Absurd,—or insincere.

“ And if sincere, the heavier blow

In that case we shall bear,

For where’s our blessed ‘ status quo,’

Our holy treaties, where,—

Or rights to sell a race, or buy,

Protect and pillage, occupy,

And civilize despair ?”

Some muttered that the great Deed meant

A great pretext to sin ;

And others, the pretext, so lent,

Was heinous (to begin).

Volcanic terms of “great” and “just?”
Admit such tongues of flame, the crust
Of time and law falls in.

A great Deed in this world of ours ?
Unheard of the pretence is :
It threatens plainly the great Powers :
Is fatal in all senses.
A just Deed in the world ?—call out
The rifles ! be not slack about
The national defences.

And many murmured, “From this source
What red blood must be poured !”
And some rejoiced, “ ‘Tis even worse ;
What red tape is ignored !”
All cursed the Doer for an evil
Called here, enlarging on the Devil,—
There, monkeying the Lord !

Some said, it could not be explained,
Some, could not be excused ;
And others, “Leave it unrestrained,
Gehenna’s self is loosed.”
And all cried, “Crush it, maim it, gag it,
Set dog-toothed lies to tear it ragged,
Truncated and traduced !”

But HE stood sad before the sun,
 (The peoples felt their fate).
 "The world is many,—I am one ;
 My great Deed was too great.
 God's fruit of justice ripens slow :
 Men's souls are narrow ; let them grow.
 My brothers, we must wait."

The tale is ended, child of mine,
 Turned graver at my knee.
 They say your eyes, my Florentine,
 Are English : it may be :
 And yet I've marked as blue a pair
 Following the doves across the square
 At Venice by the sea.

Ah, child ! ah, child ! I cannot say
 A word more. You conceive
 The reason now, why just to-day
 We see our Florence grieve.
 Ah, child ! look up into the sky !
 In this low world, where great Deeds die,
 What matter if we live ?





A PORTRAIT.

"One name is Elizabeth."—BEN JONSON.

I WILL paint her as I see her.
Ten times have the lilies blown,
Since she looked upon the sun.

And her face is lily-clear,
Lily-shaped, and dropped in duty
To the law of its own beauty

Oval cheeks encoloured faintly,
Which a trail of golden hair
Keeps from fading off to air :

And a forehead fair and saintly,
Which two blue eyes undershine,
Like meek prayers before a shrine.

Face and figure of a child,—
Though too calm, you think, and tender,
For the childhood you would lend her.

Yet child-simple, undefiled,
Frank, obedient,—waiting still
On the turnings of your will.

Moving light, as all your things,
As young birds, or early wheat,
When the wind blows over it.

Only, free from flutterings
Of loud mirth that scorneth measure—
Taking love for her chief pleasure.

'Choosing pleasures, for the rest,
Which come softly—just as she,
When she nestles at your knee.



Quiet talk she liketh best,
In a bower of gentle looks—
Watering flowers, or reading books.

And her voice it, murmurs lowly
As a silver stream may run,
Which yet feels, you feel, the sun.

And her smile, it seems half holy,
As if drawn from thoughts more fair
Than our common jestings are.

And if any poet knew her,
He would sing of her with falls
Used in lovely madrigals.

And if any painter drew her,
He would paint her unaware
With a halo round the hair.

And if reader read the poem,
He would whisper—"You have done a
Consecrated little Una."

And a dreamer (did you show him
That same picture) would exclaim,
" 'Tis my angel, with a name!"

And a stranger, when he sees her
In the street even—smileth stilly,
Just as you would at a lily.

And all voices that address her,
Soften, sleeken every word,
As if speaking to a bird.

And all fancies yearn to cover
The hard earth whereon she passes;
With the thymy scented grasses.

And all hearts do pray, "God love her!"—
Ay, and always, in good sooth,
We may all be sure HE DOETH.

VOID IN LAW.

SLEEP, little babe, on my knee,
Sleep, for the midnight is chill,
And the moon has died out in the tree,
And the great human world goeth ill.
Sleep, for the wicked agree :
Sleep, let them do as they will.
Sleep.

Sleep, thou hast drawn from my breast
The last drop of milk that was good ;
And now, in a dream, suck the rest,
Lest the real should trouble thy blood.
Suck, little lips dispossessed,
As we kiss in the air whom we would.
Sleep.

O lips of thy father ! the same,
So like ! Very deeply they swore
When he gave me his ring and his name,
To take back, I imagined, no more !
And now is all changed like a game,
Though the old cards are used as of yore ?
Sleep.

“Void in law,” said the Courts. Something wrong
In the forms ? Yet, “Till death part us two,
I, James, take thee, Jessie,” was strong,
And ONE witness competent. True
Such a marriage was worth an old song,
Heard in Heaven though, as plain as the New.
Sleep.

Sleep, little child, his and mine !
Her throat has the antelope curve,
And her cheek just the color and line
Which fade not before him nor swerve :
Yet *she* has no child !—the divine
Seal of right upon loves that deserve.
Sleep.

My child ! though the world take her part,
Saying, “She was the woman to choose,
He had eyes, was a man in his heart,”—

We twain the decision refuse :
We . . weak as I am, as thou art, . .
Cling on to him, never to loose.
Sleep.

He thinks that, when done with this place,
All's ended ? he'll new-stamp the ore ?
Yes, Cæsar's—but not in our case.
Let him learn we are waiting before
The grave's mouth, the heaven's gate, God's face,
With implacable love evermore.
Sleep.

He's ours, though he kissed her but now ;
He's ours, though she kissed in reply ;
He's ours, though himself disavow,
And God's universe favour the lie ;
Ours to claim, ours to clasp, ours below,
Ours above, . . if we live, if we die.
Sleep.

Ah baby, my baby, too rough
Is my lullaby ? What have I said ?
Sleep ! When I've wept long enough
I shall learn to weep softly instead,
And piece with some alien stuff
My heart to lie smooth for thy head.
Sleep.

Two souls met upon thee, my sweet ;
Two loves led thee out to the sun :
Alas, pretty hands, pretty feet,
If the one who remains (only one)
Set her grief at thee, turned in a heat
To thine enemy,—were it well done.
Sleep.

May He of the manger stand near
And love thee ! An infant He came
To His own who rejected Him here,
But the Magi brought gifts all the same.
I hurry the cross on my Dear !
My gifts are the griefs I declaim !
Sleep.





MY CHILD.

My child, we were two children,
Small, merry by childhood's law ;
We used to crawl to the hen-house,
And hide ourselves in the straw.

We crowed like cocks, and whenever
The passers near us drew—
Cock-a-doodle ! they thought
'Twas a real cock that crew.

The boxes about our courtyard
We carpeted to our mind,
And lived there both together—
Kept house in a noble kind.

The neighbor's old cat often
Came to pay us a visit ;
We made her a bow and curtsey,
Each with a compliment in it.

After her health we asked,
Our care and regard to evince—
(We have made the very same speeches
To many an old cat since.)

We also sate and wisely
Discoursed, as old folks do,
Complaining how all went better
In those good times we knew,—

How love and truth and believing
Had left the world to itself,
And how so dear was the coffee,
And how so rare was the pelf.

The children's games are over,
The rest is over with youth—
The world, the good games, the good times,
The belief, and the love, and the truth,



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